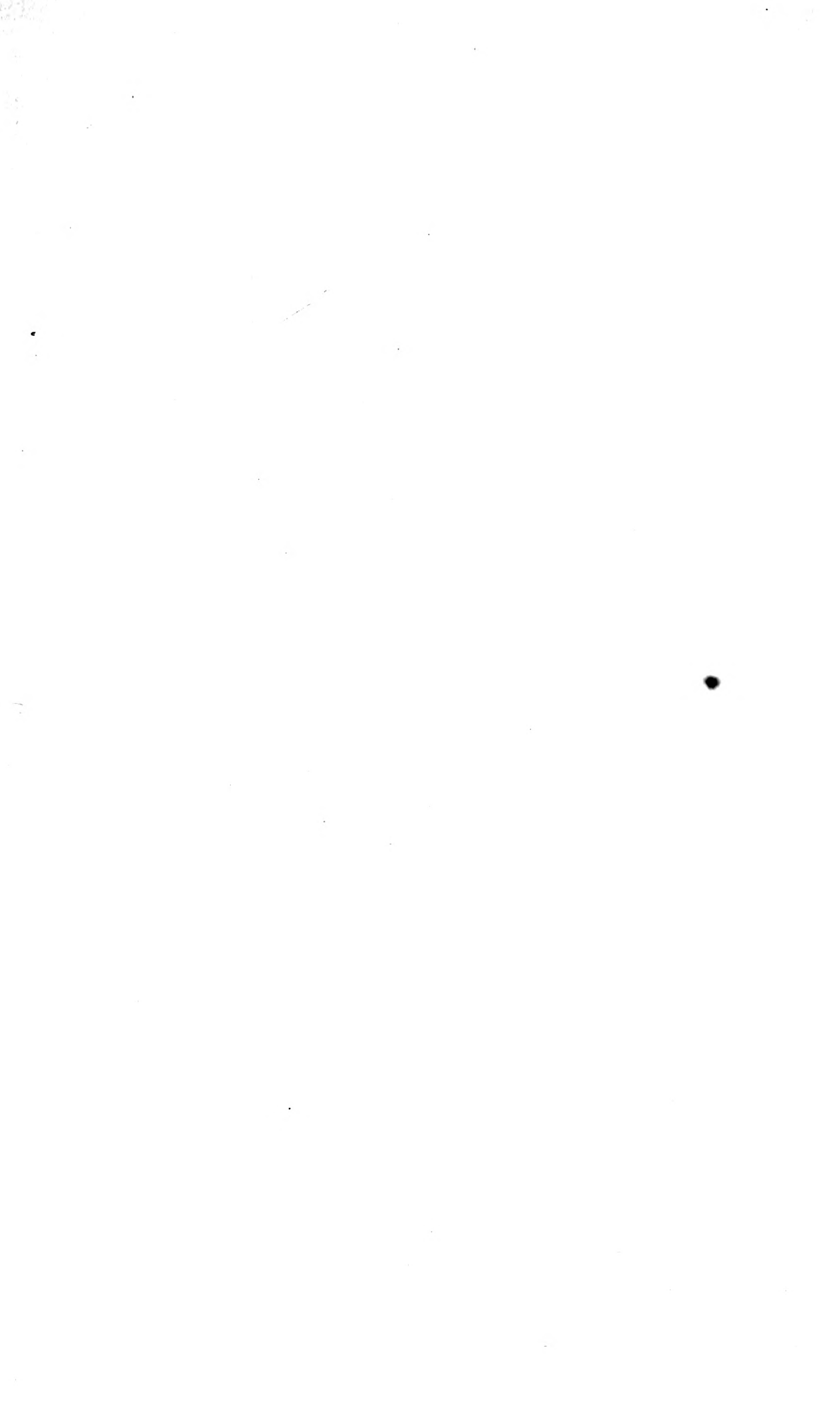


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A SON OF MARS.

BY

MAJOR ARTHUR GRIFFITHS,

AUTHOR OF

'THE QUEEN'S SHILLING,' 'LOLA,' 'A WAYWARD WOMAN,' ETC.

VOL. I.

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A SON OF MARS.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE MILITARY CRADLE.

To the right, under the arch leading to the casemate barracks at Triggertown, dwelt Jonadab Larkins, a deserving public servant who had enjoyed the proud position of barrack sergeant for some years. He was like the old lady who lived in the shoe. He had more children than he could do with comfortably, so he gave it up as a bad job, and let them do for themselves. Mrs. Larkins, what with cooking, cleaning, and the family washing, had no spare time on her hands; and except to yell out shrill

cautions which no one heeded, or threats of corporal punishment which were forgotten as soon as uttered, allowed her brood to risk their lives as freely as they pleased. They had many outlets of this kind; one favourite amusement was to hang themselves to the chains of the drawbridge leading to the barracks; another to walk along the brick edge of the counterscarp; but that which all enjoyed most was to watch the approach of vehicles in the main thoroughfare, and to rush madly across the road right under the horses' feet. It was often a very near thing; and the nearer they went to self immolation the better they were pleased. But the pitcher goes once too often to the well. One fine day there was a tremendous disturbance in the street; a crowd gathered quickly, and presently a message reached Mrs. Larkins that

one of her bairns had been driven over and was killed.

‘Which on ’em is it?’ shrieked the red-armed but pleasant-visaged dame. ‘Not Rechab, nor yet Sennacherib, nor yet Jemimer Ann?’

No; it was Hercules Albert, the eldest of the family, who was just then carried in and laid upon the bed.

A lady—a middle-aged lady, with silver white hair and a worn emaciated face—followed, and looking round with a strange wild look in her eyes, asked almost hysterically:

‘Is he much injured? Will he live? Where are the people who call themselves his parents?’

The lad was only stunned, and a little water quickly brought him to.

‘I should have been so grieved had he

come to harm,' went on the lady. 'It was my coachman's fault. It has been a terrible shock to me; quite terrible. But tell me—'

She looked hastily round, then whispered to Larkins—

'How did you come by this child?'

The Sergeant stared at her in amazement—

'Honestly! Why, it's our own—leastways it's the mother's.'

'Do you mean that you are its mother?' she asked of Mrs. Larkins.

'Certainly I do! Do you dispute it?'

'Mother? Yes. It may be so. But you, you man, you are not his father? You cannot be. It is impossible, simply impossible. Why, the child has *his* eyes; his own dear eyes, I could swear to them among a thousand. You cannot, you shall

not deceive me. How came you by this child ?’

‘He’s not my own son, that I won’t deny,’ said the Sergeant. ‘But he is my missus’s; she was a widow when I married her, and—’

‘I must have the boy. You cannot refuse him to me. I will buy him of you; will pay you any price you please. But he must leave this place. It is no place for *him*.’

And she gazed scornfully at the humble surroundings. The little dark vaulted room with its one deep recessed window, its inner space curtained off to form a second bedroom, the litter and mess about the floor.

‘This is no place for—’

She paused suddenly, and a wild scared look came over her face. A footman, one of her own people, a tall, black-whiskered

and pompous Jeames, was standing in the doorway, and the sudden apparition seemed to put a seal upon her tongue.

‘The horses, m’ lady,’ said the man respectfully enough, although there was an accent of authority in his voice. ‘The horses have been standing nearly half an hour, m’ lady, and the coachman says—’

‘Yes, yes, I’ll come at once—at once, Robert. Good people, you will understand my anxiety for the boy. The blame rested so entirely upon us. It is an immense relief to know that he is not injured.’

Then watching her opportunity, she hissed out with frenzied eagerness—

‘Not a word to a soul; not a syllable, as you value *his* future and my peace. I will come again to-morrow, or sooner, unattended. H—sh, for heaven’s sake, h—sh,’ and she hurriedly left the room.

‘Well, I’m blowed,’ said the Sergeant, drawing a long breath. ‘If that ain’t the runnest game. What does it mean, missus? Can you tell?’

Mrs. Larkins met his inquiring eyes quite steadily, and if she was conscious of any mystery no suspicion of it could be traced in her voice and manner.

‘She must be off her head—that’s my notion—clean, stark, staring mad.’

‘And mine too. Yon flunkey was her keeper, I expect. Bound to look after her and keep her out of mischief. It’ll make a fine talk in the barracks, this will.’

‘I don’t see why it should. I wouldn’t let on if I was you ; don’t gossip about it at the canteen, Sergeant, or at the sergeants’ mess. What’s the good?’

A docile and obedient husband was Sergeant Larkins, who, through all the

years of his married life, had accepted his wife's will as law. Mrs. Larkins was a buxom, bright-eyed dame, who made a man's home comfortable for him, so long as he allowed her to rule.

‘You're right. It's a folly always to talk, leastways when you've nothing to talk about, and the freaks of a mad woman don't amount to much. We shan't hear no more about *her*.’

Nor did they for days, nay, weeks, but months, and the episode was fading from their memories, at least from that of the Sergeant, when the lady suddenly re-appeared unattended and alone.

She looked suspiciously about her as she entered the room.

‘I could not come before. I have been watched. Even now I fear they are on my track. Quick! Where is the boy?’

Hercules Albert was where he and his brothers generally were—in mischief.

‘I must see him ; my heart yearns for him. And to think that I should find him thus ! How inscrutable are the ways of Providence ! My sweet, my pet, it is balm to my wounded heart !’ And she kissed and fondled the boy, regardless of the mud with which his dirty face was encrusted, and of his own evident perturbation and objection to these endearments.

‘But I must not waste time. I may be disturbed before I have said my say. Listen : you will let me have the child ? You shall name your own price. I will ask no questions. Keep your own counsel. You shall not divulge your secrets.’

‘There ain’t no secrets to divulge,’ said the Sergeant stoutly. ‘And you shan’t buy

a brat of mine, as though he were a full-blooded Congo on the West coast.'

'Wait, Larkins—let's see what the lady means,' the practical wife interposed. Mrs. Larkins was quite quiet and self-possessed, as she looked her strange visitor full in the face. 'Perhaps she will explain. Do you wish to adopt the child?'

'I do—and more. I wish to educate him to be worthy of his birth, and of that position which he must some day come to, in spite of all. He shall have all my love while I live, all my possessions after death. They are his by right, indefeasible. Has he not Herbert's eyes? Is he not my—?'

'Say no more, Madam,' Mrs. Larkins interrupted her. 'If you are in sober, serious earnest, if you mean what you say—'

'Surely you would not part with the child, not like this?'

‘We have seven, Jonadab, and it is a fine chance for one. If you are in earnest, Madam—’

‘Will this prove to you that I am in earnest?’ said the lady, taking from her purse a roll of bank notes. ‘Here are fifty pounds. Spend it in outfit; get him proper clothes, books, boxes, all that a boy wants when he is going to a school. Within a fortnight you shall hear from me through a lawyer. I will send full instructions, and a confidential messenger, who shall take Herbert—Herbert he must be called, not Hercules—Herbert Farrington.’

‘Is that your own name?’ asked Mrs. Larkins, rather hurriedly.

‘Certainly, I am Lady Farrington. You have then heard the name before? You know me? Say you know me, that you knew Herbert. Confess that Herbert was—’

‘My lady, you are mistaken; I never knew any Herbert Farrington—never in all my life!’

Lady Farrington shook her head sadly.

‘If you know, and will not speak, you may do the child irreparable harm. No matter. It is sufficient for the present that he is mine; that he passes into my keeping; that I am free to lavish upon him the whole of my pent-up yearning affection. The rest will come—all in good time. Heaven bless you, Herbert, and prosper you, and bring you some day to your own.’

She kissed the bewildered boy repeatedly, shook hands with his father and mother, and then left the place.

‘I don’t like it, I don’t; blowed if I do,’ said the Sergeant. ‘It ain’t fair on the youngster, it ain’t—to give him over to that

crack-brained old idiot! Why, you may tell she is mad by her talk and her ways. Maybe she'll fatten him up and eat him; or perhaps she'll turn him into a Papist or a Frenchman. He shan't go.'

'You're a fool, Larkins! But it's more my business than it is yours after all. And where's the harm? Doesn't she promise fair enough, and ain't these notes a pretty certain proof that she is all above board? We won't lose sight of the boy—not altogether. We'll stipulate that we are to see him sometimes, and then he can't go far wrong. But you hold your tongue, that's what you've got to do. None of your blabbing or gossiping about. If they ask you what's become of Herkles, why say he's got into the Duke of York's school, and won't be back for ever so long.'

'I wish he had. I could see my way

then. But I can't now, and it beats me how you can take it all so coolly.'

The honest Sergeant was chiefly concerned as to the little chap's future prospects. But although he was not a man of keen intelligence or of suspicious nature, he was also a little exercised as to the strangeness of the whole affair. He might explain the lady's conduct by calling it eccentricity or madness, but he could not quite understand the part his wife had played.

He would have been still more perplexed had he returned unexpectedly from the canteen that evening after all the children were in bed. He would have found his wife engrossed with the treasures of a little box which she had emptied on her lap. A few gilt buttons, a lock of fair hair, a bow of ribbon—that was all.

Yet she wept bitterly as she kissed them again and again, and restored them one by one to the sacred box reverentially, as though each was a relic in her eyes.

CHAPTER II.

THE FARRINGTON FAMILY.

FARRINGTON COURT was the dower-house of the Farrington family, where dowagers and heirs apparent resided, according as it might happen to suit. The Lady Farrington mentioned in the last chapter had occupied it for years—ever since the death of her husband and her sons, when the bulk of the property, with the title, had passed to Rupert Farrington, the late baronet's nephew. Sir Rupert lived now at Farrington Hall, with his wife and one son of his own.

Old Lady Farrington, in her losses and her loneliness, was a woman much to be pitied. She had seen her children die, all of them but one. He also was dead, but

6 miserably, and at a distance probably from home. Her husband she had mourned last of all, at a time when she had most needed strength and support. The new baronet did not treat her well. She was no doubt fortified by ample settlements. Farrington Court was hers also, by right inalienable, during her lifetime. Yet Sir Rupert had had it in his power to put her to infinite pain, and wittingly or unwittingly had not spared her in the least. The ejectment from the Hall—her once happy home, the scene of her married life, where all her children had been born, and where all were buried, save one—had been carried out with an almost brutal abruptness, which cut the poor afflicted soul to the quick. Sir Rupert had driven hard bargains with her also in taking over the house and the estate; had insisted upon the uttermost

farthing, had denied her many possessions, small and great, which she valued as reminding her of the past, but which were his, according to the strict letter of the law. His unkindness pursued her even to the house which she might still call her own. But hers was only a life-interest, after all; and, as Farrington Court must in due course lapse back to the family, Sir Rupert felt bound, he said, for his own and his son's sake, to see that the place came to no harm. His interference and inquisitiveness were, in consequence, constant and vexatious. He insisted upon inspecting the house regularly; he must satisfy himself that the repairs were duly executed, that the gardens and glass houses were properly kept up, and that no timber was cut down. He did not scruple to tell Lady Farrington that he looked upon her as a tenant, and

by no means a good one, to whom he would gladly give notice to quit if he could.

These first causes for irritation and dislike deepened in time to positive hatred. Lady Farrington came by degrees to fear Sir Rupert with a terror that was almost abject; and when we fear others to this extent we undoubtedly hate them very cordially too. Her terror was not difficult to explain. It had its grounds in the conviction that she was more or less in his power. There was a secret which she had as she thought kept hitherto entirely to herself, but which he, as time passed and brought him opportunities for close observation, had eventually discovered. She herself knew, and by degrees she felt that he also knew that her mind was a little unsound.

Lady Farrington had been an eccentric woman even in her husband's lifetime. Her

ways had been odd; her manners strange. She was given to curious likes and dislikes, which showed themselves in extraordinary ways. Thus she hated the wife of a neighbouring squire—an upstart woman, certainly, but nothing worse than *gauche* or ill-bred. Whenever this lady called at the hall the chair on which she had sat was sent to the upholsterers to be re-covered. On one occasion, when she came at the time of afternoon tea, Lady Farrington threw the cup and saucer her visitor had used into the fire, declaring it should never be drunk out of again. A more unnatural antipathy was that which she long entertained for her second son—a dislike which had caused him much misery, and her much subsequent anguish of mind. As against all this, she had been extravagantly fond of her husband and her first-born. When the for-

mer left her even for a few hours, she kept his hat and walking-stick in the room with her, as though to cheat herself into the belief that he was really in the house; the latter she coddled and cosseted to such an extent that he grew up weakly and died young.

But after all her bitter trials and heavy blows, her eccentricity had developed so rapidly that it might fairly be called by a stronger name. At first she shut herself up in a private chamber, surrounded by the relics of happier days, and brooded sorrowfully over riding-whips, cricket-bats, and all manner of childish toys. Then she went to the other extreme; threw off her widow's weeds and decked out in gay colours, and with a long white veil, drove about the country lanes in a carriage with grey horses, as though she were a newly-married bride.

When Sir Rupert's persecution had grown into a serious annoyance, she concentrated upon him all the aversion she had once levelled at more innocent objects of dislike. She never would have admitted him to the house, but as he would take no denial she consoled herself by throwing open all the windows and doors, whatever the weather, directly he had left the house, insisting that the place was unfit for habitation until it had been thoroughly aired. Then, saying his threats and menaces put her in bodily fear, she got into the habit of packing all her most treasured belongings in one or two trunks which she kept locked in her bedroom, under her own eye, in readiness as it were for immediate flight.

For a long time Sir Rupert seemed to take but little notice of her vagaries. When the county folk commiserated him, and

inquired after poor Lady Farrington, he merely shrugged his shoulders and touched his forehead in a melancholy pitying way. She had had so much trouble in her time, poor soul. It was very dreadful of course. But what could be done? She had every care and attention he could secure for her. He went to see her frequently in spite of her strange dislike, so did his wife. He did his duty by her as well as he possibly could. She was harmless, and as he thought perfectly safe. She had good servants about her; he himself saw to that, and there was no necessity to put her under restraint—unless indeed, she became very much worse. If her malady increased to the extent of endangering the safety of those about her or of the house—by no means a secondary consideration with him—why then, as a last alternative, she must be shut up.

He did not conceal from her, however, that this would ultimately be her fate. More than once he warned her that he knew her condition, and would some day be compelled to take steps to make her secure. But he said this with no object but to prove his power, and Lady Farrington would probably have been left to pursue the curious tenour of her ways, had not her mania taken a direction which threatened to be distinctly inconvenient to Sir Rupert.

Of all the woes which Lady Farrington suffered, the keenest perhaps was remorse for her treatment of her second son. As has been said, she had looked upon him always with disfavour; Herbert never could please. Where another more tenderly cared for would have been gently corrected, he was called wilful, obstinate, perverse,

and sharply chided and admonished. He it was who was always in the wrong; he it was who led the other boys into mischief. It was his fault, or said to be his, when the boat upset, or the ice broke, or the gun went off, or any mishap occurred. As he grew to man's estate his mother's indifference did not soften into warmer feelings. Poor Herbert failed at school and college, the obvious consequence of early neglect. He could not pass the army examination, although he longed to wear a red coat. All he could do was to roam the woods with dog and gun at Farrington, consorting with grooms and keepers, enjoying an open air life the more because he thereby escaped from the house and his mother's sneers. But these last, although thus rarely encountered, became at length unbearable, and one fine morning Herbert was not to be

found. He had gone off, leaving a note to say that pursuit or inquiry would be fruitless, as he meant to leave England for good and all; nothing should induce him to return to Farrington Hall.

The blow fell heaviest upon Lady Farrington, who felt that she had been principally to blame. Prompt search was accordingly instituted, but all to no purpose.

Some said that he had emigrated, some that he had enlisted, others that he had gone to sea. No one ever saw him in the flesh again. Only Lady Farrington, in whom the catastrophe had worked a strong revulsion of feeling, was positive that she had seen him in the spirit more than once. He had appeared to her, last of all, just after the death of Algernon, the eldest son. Nor had he appeared alone. Hand-in-hand with him was a comely fair-haired girl, with

a baby in her arms. Herbert had pointed significantly to the child, and Lady Farrington interpreted the gesture to mean that he and his son were now the rightful heirs of the Farrington title and estates. This vision she tremulously described to her husband and to others, but it was treated even by Sir Algernon as a mere dream, or the hallucination of an over-wrought brain.

Nothing more would have been thought of the circumstances of Herbert's disappearance and shadowy return, except as a great and irreparable sorrow, but for the arrival of a mysterious packet, a year or two later, which contained a lock of light curly hair—Herbert's?—and a scrap of paper, on which was written, in Herbert's handwriting, 'Be kinder to my boy.'

After this, a frantic desire to discover and do justice to her injured son possessed Lady

Farrington, to the exclusion of all other objects in life. The family lawyers were called in; detectives, public and private, were employed; advertisements were inserted in the agony columns of the journals with the largest circulation in the world. As substantial rewards were offered, numbers of sons were promptly forthcoming. But not one of them was the right one; nor was any information which could be relied upon obtained, neither as to whether Herbert Farrington himself was alive or dead, or whether, in the latter case, he had left any heirs. Lady Farrington endured another and a more bitter disappointment than any she had hitherto experienced in life.

It was not till long after the death of her husband and her occupation of Farrington Court, that the old theory as to the

existence of a grandson was revived by her. Why or wherefore no one could understand. Had she come upon any traces of the long-lost son? Or was it merely that her mind, in its increasing weakness, worked back into old grooves? Be the cause what it might, Lady Farrington seemed at times strangely positive that she should find the missing dear one, or his representative, after all. She often hinted, darkly and mysteriously, that there was a great surprise in store for Sir Rupert. Something he little expected would assuredly come to pass when matters were properly ripe. There was no hurry. It was better to make all sure before the mine was sprung. No link in the chain must be wanting. But all would be ready ere long. Then let Sir Rupert look to himself.

All this gave the baronet, who was

really the man in possession, but little uneasiness. As the next heir, he had heard long ago of the eager inquiries for the missing Herbert; and although he had resented them then, he had accepted their impotent conclusion as an unanswerable proof that his presumptive rights were not to be impugned. On the death of Sir Algernon his title had not been disputed, and he had succeeded, as a matter of course. Lady Far-
rington had made no protest. There was no shadow of foundation for a protest. And if not then, would any person in his sober senses think of disputing his rights now, when he had a firm grip of the title, property, and place? Only an old mad woman would harbour such an idea. Even she would hardly dare to raise the question openly, after such a lapse of years. And who would believe her if she did?

He told her so, very roughly, when her allusions became more and more significant. He warned her too that 'she had better be careful what she said or did. It was a fact well known to the whole country-side that she was quite unable to take care of herself, that she was not responsible for her actions, that her proper place was an asylum, and she might come to that yet if—'

One day, when he had been taunting thus longer and more bitterly than usual, she was goaded into making an incautious reply.

'The cup is nearly full to the brim, Rupert. Your time is fast drawing to a close.'

'What new craze is this, Lady Farrington?' he said, laughing scornfully, but with a black look on his face.

Sir Rupert's was a hard dark face, with

full eyes rather prominent, and a long, drooping, black moustache. When he looked black it was not a pleasant face to see.

‘It is nothing new, Rupert. I have waited patiently, hopefully. I thought the end would never come. It is near at hand now, although the consummation has been long delayed.’

‘Your ladyship’s language is, as usual, clear and perspicuous, yet you will forgive me if I ask you to explain.’

‘Listen,’ she said, as she laid her hand upon his arm, and hissed out her words slowly one by one. ‘Within a few short months, nay weeks, whenever I choose, I can produce the rightful heir of the Far-ringtons; and he shall come to his own.’

‘This is mere rhapsody, mere raving. You cannot touch me, you know that.’

‘I can, ay, and I will, miserable fool! You have not the shadow of a claim to the title and estates. My grandson, Herbert’s son, lives, and you must make way for him.’

‘Psha! Herbert’s son? How do you know that? What proof have you?’

‘The youth himself. He has been under my charge these five years past, and more. I found him—I myself found him. I knew I could not err. He had Herbert’s eyes, he is Herbert’s image; he—’

‘He must have more proof than this if he is to make good his case in a court of law,’ said Sir Rupert coolly.

‘I know it, and the proof shall be forthcoming. Every link in the chain.’

‘All right. If it is to be war to the knife, so let it be. But I tell you plainly that no one will believe a word you say.’

‘They will believe my beautiful boy, my own Herbert’s boy, when they hear his story from his own sweet lips. He shall come forward himself when the occasion is ripe for him to speak.’

‘Where is he now?’ asked Sir Rupert, carelessly, but with deeply cunning intent.

She laughed in his face.

‘No, no, Sir Rupert, I am not to be so easily beguiled. He is safe, quite safe, to be produced at exactly the right time.’

Sir Rupert gave her another fierce look, which boded her no good, but he said nothing more. He was not exactly disconcerted by her positive assertions, which he only half believed, yet his peace of mind had been rudely assailed. That he must discover the whereabouts of this mysterious claimant, and test the accuracy of Lady Farrington’s far-fetched statements, was

clear. It was equally clear that he must, if possible, put a gag upon the old woman, and remove her where she could work no further harm.

CHAPTER III.

'TWIXT CUP AND LIP.

HERCULES ALBERT—or Herbert, as he was henceforth to be called—was not a little taken aback by the sudden change in his circumstances, which followed Lady Farrington's supposed recognition of him. To be measured for a suit of black cloth, which befitted best the Larkins' notion of gentility; to have a brand new box, painted green, with sundry new shirts, new boots, and a broad-brimmed wide-awake hat, all his own; these were so many delicious surprises, the full effect of which was fully borne in upon him by the openly-expressed envy of the rest of the family. But it was a wrench to him when the time

came to leave his home—the only one he had ever known—to lose the companionship of his playmates, and the warm, though roughly-expressed, affection of the sergeant and his wife.

‘Be a man, Herkles,’ the sergeant had said, as the boy stood snivelling at the door of the casemated room, which represented the whole of the Larkins’ establishment. ‘Eat your cake.’ They had provided him with a huge slice of bun-loaf, upon which little Sennacherib Larkins, a freebooter like his Assyrian sponsor, had made many inroads while Herbert’s attention was distracted by the new cares of property and the pangs of making his adieux.

‘Eat your cake, and keep up your heart; me and the missus ’ll be over to see you before the month’s out, and we’ll bring Rechab and Senn and Jemimer Ann.’

‘It’s all for your own good, Herbert,’ said Mrs. Larkins. ‘They’re going to make a gentleman of you. You’ll get learning, and Latin, and French mathematics; and by and by you’ll be an officer, perhaps, and live like a lord.’

The prospect was brilliant, but remote. Herbert, as a child of the barracks, had been brought up to believe that officers were almost superior beings. He saw his father, the sergeant, and all soldiers salute them always, and pay them extraordinary deference. When in uniform they were resplendent in crimson and gold; when out of it they drove dog-carts and played cricket and owned dogs, all of which Herbert would have liked to have done too. Yet the off-chance of some day becoming an officer himself did not reconcile him to separation from the best friends he had in

the world; and as he left Triggertown case-mates, he wept bitterly, and refused to be comforted.

If life looked black and forbidding then, it was a thousand times worse when he got to school. A cross-grained old man—it was Mr. Bellhouse, Lady Farrington's solicitor—escorted him thither, and snubbed him all the way. The old lawyer was a little sick of her ladyship's caprices, and considered this last the most serious of all. But it was none of Herbert's fault, and the poor woe-begone home-sick lad did not deserve to be made to answer for Lady Farrington's sins. At school he was left stranded, like a waif of the sea upon an unknown shore. Presently the natives, troops of little savage school-boys, swooped down upon him to scalp and torture him. He was pestered with questions, and his

hair pulled, his strange wide-awake was jeered at, and given to the winds.

But the instincts of self-defence are strong, and Herbert, if new to school life, was not new to the use of his fists. His tormentors were numerous, but with one or two exceptions were not much older or bigger than himself, and when it came to a question of blows and hard knocks he was physically well able to take care of himself. Presently a 'straight un' from the shoulder relieved him of the most troublesome of his assailants, and a second, planted upon the nose of a tall bully, proved that Herbert thought nothing of disparity in height when disposing of his foes. Boys are sensibly affected by the display of pluck, especially against superior odds, and Herbert soon gained for himself the respect

due to his prowess, and immunity from further annoyance.

He was vexed and irritated no more, but he went to his bed, a far more cleanly and luxurious couch than that which he had been accustomed to in the crowded casemate at Triggertown, with a sad and sorrowful heart. There are no woes so acute as those of early youth. Happily they are as transient as they are intense. Herbert at night was in the depths of woe; next morning he was already in a fair way to recover his spirits, and before the day was out, in the excitement of the new life opening before him, he had forgotten his sorrows and was as happy as a bird. He was just the boy to get on at school. Brisk and buoyant in disposition, with a well-knit vigorous frame, a predilection for games of every kind in which, with a little experi-

ence, he soon excelled, he rapidly advanced in the estimation of his fellows. He was liberal and free-handed too, which did not make him the less appreciated, and he had plenty to give away. 'His people,' as boys call their friends, were evidently of the right sort. The old lady with the snow-white hair and large mournful eyes, who came to see him regularly every month, was right royal in her tips, and not to him alone, but to any whom he called particular friends. He got tuck baskets continually and presents of all kinds to which others administered as freely as himself. These are substantial grounds for school popularity, and Herbert enjoyed it in the highest degree.

As he grew in years and developed in strength and good looks, Lady Farrington's affectionate admiration knew no bounds.

She lavished caresses on him without ceasing, declaring that he was daily becoming more and more fitted for the station which would some day be his.

‘Yes, yes, the end cannot be far off now,’ she said one day as she sat in the headmaster’s drawing-room, holding Herbert’s hand in hers and patting it from time to time in the fulness of her contentment. ‘Who shall gainsay your claim when they see you thus, my Herbert’s living image? my son! My son, my lost unhappy son!’ and in a moment she was in a paroxysm of tears.

Herbert was quite accustomed to her now. At first he had been dismayed by her sudden outbursts. The rapid transition from joy to sorrow, from smiles to hysterical tears, were sufficient to frighten him, and when to these were added her wild talk, her bitter self-reproaches, her mysterious

hints of his coming greatness, he scarcely knew what to do or say. But by degrees he became familiar with her eccentricities, and he felt that although she might be queer, she was certainly uncommonly kind.

‘I cannot control myself when I think of the miserable past. But, please God, in you I shall make some atonement for my sins, and soon, soon,—for the time draws nigh. You are equal, Herbert, I trust, to a great and arduous trial?’

He was now nearly seventeen, tall and well-built for his age; and as he shook his light curls and looked steadily at her with his clear, honest eyes, he seemed the incarnation of youth and hope.

‘I am game for anything, Lady Farrington, only try me. I’d face the whole world if you asked me.’

‘My own brave boy! The struggle

may be sharp, but with such a spirit the victory is certain to be ours.'

'When may I know what it is that I have to do?'

'The time draws nigh. It depends only on you and your fitness to play your part. You have not neglected your opportunities I know. Dr. Jiggs gives you a high character. You have profited by his studies, you have learnt to ride and shoot, and when you come to your own you will comport yourself as an English gentleman should.'

'I am a gentleman born, then?'

'Of the best,' she replied proudly. 'You are—why conceal it longer? Here you have for reasons been still known as Herbert Larkins, my ward, but you are really my grandson, the only child of Herbert, my second boy. You are Sir Herbert

Farrington, the rightful heir of the family honours of an old name and wide estates.'

'Is this certain, quite certain?'

'Absolutely—at least to me. I have never doubted from the first. My instinct assured me I was right when I recognised you in Triggertown. But as the world needs more material proof I have sought them out, and hold them now all but one. This also I should have possessed had not one person failed me.'

'Who was that?'

'Mrs. Larkins. She alone can tell us what we want to know, and she has most unaccountably hesitated or refused to speak. This is why I have broken with her—why I have forbidden them to come and see you again.'

These honest people had paid several visits to Herbert at school, visits he had

received with delight. They had ceased suddenly, and he had wondered greatly thereat.

‘But if my mother—if Mrs. Larkins—’

‘Mrs. Larkins is not your mother, Herbert, of that you may rest assured.’

‘She was as good as one to me always, I know that. But if she is the only person who can help us in this matter, was it prudent to break with her altogether?’ Herbert asked very pertinently.

‘I was annoyed, angry, and they were proud—I will seek them out again. They are necessary to us. Mrs. Larkins shall speak, and we will proceed at once to establish your claim. My patience is exhausted and Rupert’s cup is full.’

This conversation occurred at a time mentioned in a previous chapter when her

relations with Sir Rupert had become more and more constrained. War had long been imminent between them, but a rupture had been precipitated by the overbearing harshness of his ways. She had spoken, therefore, a little rashly and prematurely perhaps, and in doing so had shown her hand. She had practically thrown down the glove, daring him to do his worst. He accepted the challenge, and acted with a promptitude and determination for which the poor cracked-brained old lady was certainly no match.

His first step was to put a watch upon Lady Farrington's movements. Mr. Ooze-nam, the well-known private detective, was employed, who set about his task with his usual skill and despatch. Within a week or two he came with his first report.

‘Lady Farrington goes once every month, often twice, to Deadham School, in

Essex. She has done so these five years past and more.'

'Of course. The cub, her *protégé*, is there. Well?'

'A ward of her ladyship's, Herbert Larkins, is at school there. He is now seventeen years of age, is tall and well grown, has fair curly hair and greyish blue eyes. Her ladyship is said to take an immense interest in him. Their interviews are long. She must be very liberal to him; the lad is always well provided with money which he spends freely. He is a fair scholar, has been taught especially to ride and shoot, has learnt foreign languages and all extras.'

'That is enough, Mr. Oozenam. You have handsomely earned your fee.'

'It has gone very far,' Sir Rupert said to himself as soon as he was alone. 'What an idiot I have been not to have observed

her more closely ! But let us hope it is not too late even now.'

And then, after a long cogitation, he called for his carriage, and driving first into the neighbouring country town, where he made one or two calls, he bade the coachman next proceed to Farrington Court.

He asked for Lady Farrington, and was in due course ushered into her private boudoir.

'The time has come, Lady Farrington, as you were good enough to say some time back—the time for plain speaking. I mean to put an end to your tomfooleries once for all. So long as they merely made you appear ridiculous I could have borne with you, although you scandalized our name. But I cannot permit you to plot against me and mine without protest and something more.'

'Plot?' she asked, in a voice which

anger and agitation combined to make nearly inarticulate.

‘I have discovered all. You have kept your secret well, but I have found it out. This base-born pretender—’

‘He is my own grandson. I have the proofs.’

‘They will not bear the test of legal scrutiny, you know that. On the contrary, I can show that the whole affair is a conspiracy from beginning to end. That this Larkins is an adventurer—’

‘You will not harm him, surely? It is I, only I, who am to blame.’

‘I shall hand him over to the police, prosecute him, and make him pay dearly for his attempt to defraud.’

‘You would not dare,’ she cried aghast. Surprise and indignation combined to confuse her mind, and she did not pause to

consider that he had no grounds of procedure; that his threats were vain, and could never be put into execution.

‘I shall not spare him nor you.’

‘Then you shall take the consequences. I will proclaim you to be the villain that you are; will tear you from your present exalted station, and will send you back to your former poverty and rags. You shall be dispossessed. You shall disgorge the rents and all that you have improperly acquired. You—’

He merely laughed at her, mockingly and rudely, which exasperated her beyond all bounds.

‘Begone, sir! You shall not remain here another second to insult me. Begone! or—’

He only laughed more loudly and mockingly than before. Instantly her rage

passed into fury which seemed uncontrollable.

'Begone !' she cried again, snatching up a sharp-pointed paper knife and rushing on him with so much intention that Sir Rupert precipitately retired. She followed him downstairs with a wild shriek, little recking how completely she was playing into his hands.

The butler had just admitted several other visitors, who heard and saw all that passed. Sir Rupert went up to them apparently for protection, but his first words showed that he was eager for more than this.

'Gentlemen, you have arrived most opportunely. You can see for yourselves. It is clearly not safe to leave her any longer at large.'

The butler had quelled poor Lady Far-

rington almost instantly, but although he held her back she was still furious and foamed at the mouth.

‘Scarcely. We cannot refuse the certificate,’ said Mr. Burkinshaw, of Bootle, a local magistrate and magnate. ‘Sir Henry quite agrees with me, and the doctors have no manner of doubt. Poor woman, she ought clearly to be put under restraint.’

And she was, without unnecessary delay.

Thus Herbert Larkins lost his protectress just when his fortune seemed close at hand. The cup was dashed away just before he had lifted it to his lips, with consequences which were by no means pleasant to himself, as will be seen in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

TAKING THE SHILLING.

HERBERT LARKINS was in the class-room when he was summoned to see a gentleman who had called.

‘I come from Lady Farrington,’ said his visitor, rather abruptly.

He was a tall, dark-eyed man, with a sinister look upon his face.

‘She is well, I hope? Nothing has happened? I half expected her to-day or to-morrow.’

‘She is well, but she cannot come here, and wishes you to go to her at once. You are aware, no doubt—’

‘The time then has arrived?’ Herbert said, a little incautiously.

‘It has arrived. You are ready, I presume?’

‘I must speak to Dr. Jiggs. I cannot leave the school without his permission, of course.’

‘That is all arranged. When you have got your belongings together, we will start. You are not to return here. You know that, I presume?’

‘We are going to join Lady Farrington?’

The visitor bowed assent.

An hour or two later they were in the train and on the road to London.

There was little conversation between them. Herbert was shy, and his companion by no means talkative or sociable.

‘Where does Lady Farrington live?’ Herbert asked.

‘You really don’t know?’

‘She never told me,’ Herbert replied, looking rather shamefaced.

‘She is a strange person, of that you must be aware. It is impossible to account for all she says and does.’

‘She has always been most kind to me,’ Herbert said, stoutly.

‘No doubt,’ the other replied, drily. ‘But perhaps that was a form of eccentricity. People are sometimes too affectionate by half.’

Herbert would have liked some explanation of this speech, but he could not bring himself to ask for it. He only knew that he began to dislike this man excessively, and hoped they might never have much to say to each other.

Arrived in London, they drove from one terminus to another. Fresh tickets were taken, for which his companion made

Herbert pay; and after a hasty meal at the refreshment-room, they were again seated in a railway carriage, travelling westward. This second was a wearisome journey, which continued far into the chill autumn night. Towards nine they alighted at a station, where their baggage was transferred to a fly, into which they entered, and were driven half-a-dozen miles or more. At length they reached a small country inn, had some supper, and were shown to their rooms.

‘Remember,’ said his companion, as he bade him good-night, ‘our affair is secret. Keep your own counsel; do not gossip with any one you may meet here. Lady Farrington does not wish her name bandied about; so mind you do not mention it to a soul.’

Herbert slept late next morning, and

when he went downstairs he found himself alone. The other gentleman had gone out, they told him, and would not return till late. Breakfast—what would he like? He might like what he pleased, but all he could get was cold bacon and bread, with thin cider to drink. A school-boy has a fine appetite, and is nowise particular. Herbert enjoyed his breakfast, as he did also his lunch and his dinner. He felt jolly enough. He asked where he was, and they told him King's Staignton in Devonshire. Was there anything to do in the place? Yes, he might fish the trout stream, which he did, very much to his own satisfaction, and spent a thoroughly pleasant day.

But when night fell, and his companion did not return, he began to feel the least bit uneasy. He eat his trout, however, and his bacon and bread, and slept the

sleep of the young, undismayed by fears of to-morrow. To-morrow came, but no companion. A third and a fourth day, and Herbert was still alone. What could it mean? He felt absolved from the necessity of holding his tongue, and he asked the landlady if she knew any one of the name of Farrington in the country round about. He was resolved to go to her ladyship himself.

‘No, they had never heard the name before.’

He now became more than puzzled. He was filled with an inexplicable but increasing dread of coming trouble, and he was just beginning his preparations for returning at once to Deadham, when the absentee suddenly reappeared.

Herbert was young, inexperienced, and terribly shy. But his was no craven spirit,

and he had enough of school-boy plain-speaking frankness about him to say,

‘Come, this is a fine lark. You would not have kept me waiting here much longer, I can tell you. I was just going to cut and run.’

‘You may cut and run as soon as you please,’ said the other gruffly. ‘The sooner the better.’

‘And what would Lady Farrington say?’

‘Lady Farrington is not in a position to say much.’

‘I should like to see her.’

‘You can’t. She’s gone off in a hurry.’

‘She never was here, or near here. I know that much, for I have enquired.’

‘You broke through my instructions, did you? Not that it matters much; and it is time you should know all. Lady Far-

rington has been put under restraint. You do not understand? Locked up in an asylum, I mean. She is mad, insane; and of all her ravings, the wildest were those which led you to suppose you were somebody, instead of a beggar's brat picked up out of the mire.'

'That I'm not, I'll swear, and no one shall call me so,' cried Herbert, hotly. He looked so fierce, with his clenched fists, broad shoulders, and light active figure, that the man for the moment was cowed.

'I don't know who you are, or where you came from. But you're not what you think you are, nor what Lady Farrington has made you believe. That is enough for me.'

'I have her word.'

'That of a mad woman!'

'And she has proofs.'

‘Which exist only in her own distraught brain.’

‘That remains to be seen. But who are you? Why are you so bitter against me? Why did you bring me here?’

‘I am Sir Rupert Farrington. It is I whom this mad old lady wishes to wrong. She has been seeking what she calls a rightful heir all these years—only that she may dispossess me. You are not the first pretender she has set up. But I think it is not unlikely you will be the last.’

Had he brought Herbert there to injure him? The thought suddenly flashed across the young man’s mind. But then there were other people at the inn; the landlady, ostlers, keepers, police not far off, none of these would knowingly suffer any foul play to be done.

‘I defy you and your threats,’ said Her-

bert. 'If I am in a false position it was none of my seeking, but I prefer to believe Lady Farrington rather than you. There are others who know of my claims, and with their help I shall yet put them forward as you will see.'

Sir Rupert snapped his fingers at him. 'How do you propose to live meanwhile? Remember you can get nothing from Lady Farrington now. You cannot go back to the school; I brought you all this way on purpose that you should not. Besides, I have written to Dr. Jiggs to put him on his guard.'

'He would still help me if I asked him; but I do not need to do that.'

'You cannot have money hoarded? That would be very unlike a school-boy. You must be nearly cleaned out by this time. I made you pay your own expenses

on purpose ; and there will be the bill here. You ought to be nearly penniless. You will have to remain here, and turn farm labourer or starve.'

'I shall not do that, you may depend. I have been well educated, thanks to Lady Farrington. I am not afraid of work, and I am well able to take care of myself. At any rate I look to you for nothing, and all I wish now is to get away from you and this place.'

Herbert called for his bill, paid it with his last sovereign, asked the way to the nearest railway station—Newton Abbot—and started off on foot, determined to get back to London as soon as he could. Thence he would find his way to Trigger-town. The Larkins were the only friends left in the world; and Mrs. Larkins, as

Lady Farrington had said, was the person who possessed the only link wanting in the chain of proofs which was to establish his claims.

At Newton Abbot he sold his watch, and had money for his ticket to London and to spare. Parting with other articles of his apparel to supply his necessities upon the road, he found himself at Triggertown upon the third day. How familiar the place seemed! Six years since he left it—a child, and now returning as a man he found everything unchanged. He passed up the covered way, across the drawbridge under the arch, and stood at the door of the casemate, expecting next moment to see the sergeant and Mrs. Larkins, and the whole of the brood.

But it was a stranger who came to answer his knock; a small vixenish woman

with a shrewish tongue. She gave him a very short answer.

‘Larkinses? They don’t stop here. Been gone these years. Where? How do I know? They got the route right enough; that’s all I can tell you.’

‘Was there no one in the barracks who could tell him?’ Herbert asked.

‘No,’ said the woman, abruptly, and shut the door in his face.

The sentry would not let him pass the inner gates. The gate sergeant, who came up, peremptory and consequential, was still more inhospitable. Whom did Herbert want? A barrack sergeant of the name of Larkins? There was no such name in the garrison.

‘Better write to the Secretary of State for War, my man,’ said the gate sergeant with gruff condescension, ‘or to the Arch-

bishop of Canterbury. One's as likely to tell you as another. But you must clear out of this. Can't have no loiterers about here. Them's my orders. May be the adjutant or the sergeant-major 'll come this way, and I don't choose to be blamed for you.'

'What regiment do you belong to?' asked Herbert.

'Can't you see for yourself?' Where could this young man have been raised not to recognise the uniform of the Duke's Own Fusiliers?

'Is it a good corps?'

The sergeant was aghast at the fellow's impudence. Like every soldier of the old school, he had been brought up to believe that his regiment was not only a good one, but the very best in the service.

‘G’long; I want no more truck with you. Clear out, or you’ll be put out.’

‘What’s your colonel’s name? I want to see him.’

‘You can’t want to see him if you don’t know his name.’

‘I do, though, on business.’

‘Pretty business! A tramp like you can’t have no business here at all, much less with the colonel or any other officer of ours.’

‘Won’t you pass me in?’

‘I won’t, there, that’s flat.’

‘All right; I’ll wait till some one comes out.’

Herbert coolly seated himself a little way down upon the slope of the glacis. If the sergeant meant to dislodge him it could only be by force.

The fact was our hero was meditating a

serious step. The disappointment of not finding his old friends where he had left them was great. He had perhaps overrated the assistance which Mrs. Larkins could give him in substantiating his claims, but he had looked for advice from them as to the disposal of his immediate future. How was he now, unknown and seemingly without a friend in the world, to find employment? That was the serious question he was called upon to solve, and that without unnecessary delay. His pockets were empty, his clothes—such as he had not pawned—had reached that stage of irretrievable seediness which clothes worn uninterruptedly for weeks will always assume. He might or might not be the heir of the Farringtons. What did it matter who he was or might be if he died of starvation before he could prove his case?

These wholesome reflections led him to accept the only means of livelihood which offered just then. He would enlist. Why not? He had been brought up within sound of the drum; his earliest recollections and associations were connected with the barrack. The life might be rough compared to the luxury of Deadham, but at least he would be fed, clothed and housed, and he need not stand still. The theory of the marshal's baton, which every knapsack is said to contain, is not exactly supported by fact in the British Army, but times were not what they had been, and he might now hope to rise rapidly enough. Yes, he would take the shilling and join the Duke's Own Fusiliers.

These were the words he addressed to the first officer who issued from the gates.

It happened to be the adjutant himself.

Mr. Wheeler was the beau ideal of a smart young soldier, quick and energetic in movement, with an eagle eye to take in the 'points' of a possible recruit.

'Want to enlist, do you? Hey, what, what, what? Where do you come from? Won't say, I suppose? Where do you belong to? Don't know, of course. What's your age? You won't tell the truth. Height? we can see to that. Health? are you sound in wind and limb? hey, what, what, what?'

All this time he had been appraising Herbert's value, had noted his broad shoulders, thin flanks, his seventy-two inches, and his erect bearing, as keenly as though he were a slave merchant about to turn a penny on a deal. The scrutiny was satisfactory. The medical examination confirmed it, the nearest magistrate sanctioned

the enlistment, and before sundown, Herbert Larkins had joined the Duke's Own and had sworn to serve Her Majesty and her heirs for a term of years.

By a strange coincidence, within a week or two, Ernest Farrington, Sir Rupert's only son, was gazetted to the same regiment, and the two young men presently found themselves in the same squad at recruit's drill.

CHAPTER V.

A CRACK CORPS.

THE Duke's Own Fusiliers had the credit of being one of the most distinguished regiments in the service of the Queen. Its colours were emblazoned with the victories in which it had shared; its mess plate was rich in gifts from the great captains and men of mark who had held commissions in its ranks. It considered itself in every respect a crack corps, and held its head high always on account of its thorough efficiency and undeniably 'good form.' Its claims to the latter could not be denied; but its rights to the former were sometimes questioned by keen-eyed critics and

people behind the scenes. The regiment no doubt turned out smartly upon parade; it always looked well, and was fairly well-behaved. But there were flaws and short-comings in its system, hidden a little below the surface, which in the crucial test of emergency would probably be laid bare. The gulf between officers and men was a little too wide; inferiors had no great confidence in those above them, the latter were generally indifferent, taking but little interest in their business, as though soldiering was not their profession, but a chance employment to fill up their hours when not otherwise engaged.

A certain Colonel Prioleau commanded the regiment at the time when Herbert Larkins enlisted into it; a soldier of the old school, at times fussy, testy, and sharp-spoken, but really a good-natured easy-going

man. He was without much strength of character however, and not over-burthened with brains. It was not strange, therefore, that he should suffer his authority to slip a little out of his own hands. He was far from supreme in the body of which he was the ostensible head. English regiments are very variously governed. This is ruled by the sergeant-major, that by the colonel's wife; in another, the general of the brigade or district, with his staff-officers, works his own wicked will. Some are, so to speak, self-governed, and the Duke's Own was one of these. In it, the will of the body corporate, of the officers banded together like a joint-stock company, and trading under the name of 'the regiment' was absolute law. By and for 'the regiment,' everything was settled and decided. The regimental idea was a species of impalpable but all-

pervading essence, which no one could resist. To quote regimental custom; to invoke regimental prestige; to talk of the credit of the regiment; to insist upon the maintenance of *esprit de corps*, were so many irresistible appeals, so many precepts of a powerful unwritten code universally accepted, and admitted to be binding upon all. In its highest form, this thoroughgoing devotion might be productive, as indeed it has often proved to be, of extraordinary good; but it was possible to develop it in the wrong direction, and this was to some extent the case with the Duke's Own Fusiliers. It was generally understood in the regiment that its credit depended less upon its military proficiency than upon the dash it cut in the world.

Military matters, in fact, were not held

in the highest esteem in the Duke's Own. Nobody cared much about them. They were left to be managed by anybody, anyhow. Now and again Colonel Prioleau raised a feeble protest, but nobody listened to him or cared. He was told that the regiment wished this, or thought that, and he immediately succumbed. Those next senior to him, his two majors, were of little assistance to him in driving the coach. One, Major Diggle, of whom more directly, did not pretend to be a soldier at all. According to his own ideas, he was always much better engaged. The other, Major Byfield, had, unfortunately, been raised in another regiment, and was so unpopular that he was worse than a cipher; the Duke's Own knew too well what was due to itself to allow an outsider to dictate to it or interfere in its affairs. The only person who did

anything in the regiment was the adjutant, and he had come by degrees to monopolise the whole of the power. The colonel gave in to him more and more, till presently he abdicated his functions to him altogether. After all, Mr. Wheeler was a smart young gentleman, not without military aptitudes. He had no dread of responsibility, and having a fair knowledge of the red-books and routine, disposed of his work daily in an airy off-hand fashion which was always refreshing, and which, in the face of any serious difficulty, would have been absolutely sublime. He pulled all the strings, decided all the moot points, gave all orders, drafted all letters, which his humble slave, the colonel, obediently signed; it was he, practically, who manœuvred the battalion, although his puppet, the colonel, nominally gave the word of command. It saved every-

body else a great deal of trouble. The men perhaps were not quite as well cared for and commanded as they ought to have been, the sergeants looking to the adjutant rather than to their officers, sometimes exceeded their powers, and carried matters with rather a high hand. Complaints of tyranny and ill-usage, however, seldom cropped up, and no suspicion ever arose that the condition of the regiment was otherwise than perfectly sound.

It was not difficult to understand why the officers as a body rather neglected their duties. They were too fully occupied in maintaining the credit of the regiment according to their own interpretation of the phrase. This meant that it should be renowned—not for marching and manœuvres, for demeanour, discipline, and drill—but for its ostentation and display, for the grand

balls and entertainments it gave, for its mess perfectly appointed, its artistic *chefs*, its exquisite wines. It was for the credit of the regiment that it should keep up a regimental drag, a cricket and lawn tennis club, and give weekly afternoon teas; that during the season six or seven at least of the Duke's Own should turn out in scarlet to hunt with the nearest hounds, that some one amongst their number should take a shooting or a river, which the regimental sportsmen might honour in turn; that half the regiment at least should rush up to town from Friday to Monday every week, and enjoy themselves in loafing about the park and the Burlington Arcade, or idling away the hours at the club, and devoutly wishing they were back at their own regimental mess.

These high-flown ideas very rapidly de-

veloped into extravagant tastes, which had reached their highest point about the time when Herbert Larkins became one of the Duke's Own. The regiment had only returned a year or two previously from a lengthened tour of foreign service, and after their long exile in outer darkness everyone with any spirit or capacity for enjoyment had been resolved to take his pleasure to the full. It was expected of the officers of the Duke's Own to come well to the front, and this they pretended was a more potent inducement to them to spend money than any hankering after personal gratification. So, with but few exceptions, they launched forth freely enough. It was, with many, a case of the earthen pots swimming with the brass; but all, or nearly all, were determined to do their duty to the regiment and go the pace, or as Mr. Crouch, the sporting quarter-

master styled it, 'go to the devil hands down.' What if any serious financial crisis supervened? Their people would have to stump up; their fathers—probably by drawing upon a wife's provision or daughter's portion, and always by impoverishing themselves—would pay their debts, but they would have had 'a high old time,' and the imperishable credit of the Duke's Own Fusiliers would have been most brilliantly maintained.

The leading spirit and showman of the regiment at this particular epoch was the junior major Cavendish-Diggle. Diggle was, in his way, a man of parts, young, pushing, ambitious, passably rich. No one knew exactly where he came from, or who were his belongings or his people. One of his patronymics was decidedly patrician, the other as unmistakeably commonplace. He

might be a cousin of the Duke of Devonshire; and again he might not. When anyone asked him the question—and it was one he liked to have put to him—he smiled pleasantly, and said that the Cavendishes were all related, as everybody knew. But he was not so well pleased when people, envious or cynical, or both, remarked casually that Diggle was the name of the great grocers in Cheapside. There was no connection on that side of course, but the allusion was far from agreeable to him, as a shrewd observer might have noticed from his face and his avowed hostility to anyone who dared to make the remark.

There were not many who were bold enough to attack him however. He could hold his own always. Nature had endowed him with a good presence and abundance of self-confidence; he could talk well, had a

good voice, and was an excellent *raconteur*. These gifts were naturally of great service to him; not alone for purposes of repartee and self-defence; they were also exceedingly useful in assisting him to obtain that social success which had ever been one of the principal aims of his life. In his boyhood, when he had made his *début* as a second lieutenant in the Duke's Own Fusiliers, he had had an uphill game to play. The regiment was then, as it still aspired to be, eminently aristocratic, and no one was disposed to welcome a Diggle with rapturous effusion. There was nothing against the lad, however, except the possible obscurity of his origin; on the contrary, there was much in his favour. He was modest and unpretending, fully impressed with the 'greatness' of 'the regiment' he had joined, falling down readily to worship the principal

personages who were its idols at the time. He sought to attach himself to one or two of the most distinguished cadets of noble houses, who were nobodies at home, but made a good deal of in the Duke's Own. Diggle's hero worship, accompanied as it was by a willingness to bet, play *écarté*, and do good turns to his superiors—he thought them so himself—met with its reward, and he soon found himself in the position to enjoy the daily companionship and friendship of one or two baronets and several lords' sons. It was long, however, before he advanced himself beyond the rather undignified status of a 'hanger-on.' His friends and comrades were very affectionate—with the regiment—but they were not so fond of him in town; nor did they help him into society, or get him invitations to their homes. But as time passed, and he gained

promotion and seniority, his persistent efforts gradually achieved a certain success. He now took a prominent part in regimental entertainments, was willing to accept all the drudgery of managing balls and parties, because he thus came more to the front. At one rather dull country station he struck out the happy idea of giving dances on his account in his own quarters, which happened to be large, and at his own expense, and this gained for him great popularity in the neighbourhood. It was about this time that he began to lay much stress upon the Cavendish prefix to his proper name; he always called himself Cavendish-Diggle, had it so put in the *Army List* and upon his cards. Then the regiment went on foreign service, and while stationed in an out-of-the-way colony, he had the good fortune to be selected to act upon the personal staff of

the governor and commander-in-chief. He turned this appointment to excellent account. He was soon the life and soul of Government House, developing at once into a species of diplomatic major-domo, who was simply indispensable to his chief. In this way he made many new and valuable friends; a young royalty on his travels, who was charmed with Captain Cavendish-Diggles's devotion to his person; several heirs apparent also, and itinerant legislators, who took Baratania in their journey round the world, and who could not be too grateful for all he did for them, or too profuse in their promises of civilities whenever he might be in England. All this bore fruit in the long run, when the regiment returned. He experienced many disappointments, no doubt; for your notable on his travels, so cordial and so gushing, is apt to

give you the cut direct if you meet him in his own hunting-grounds, at home. Still there were some did not quite forget the hospitable and obliging A.D.C.; and Major Cavendish-Diggle, at the invitation of one, went into Norfolk to shoot; of another to Scotland to fish; in the London season he found several houses open to him; and he was finally raised to a pinnacle of satisfaction by Royal commands to attend a garden party and a court ball.

In the Duke's Own he was now a very great personage indeed. As both the Colonel and Major Byfield were married he was the senior member of the mess; always its most prominent figure; the chief host in all impromptu parties at home; the great man at all entertainments abroad. He had now a following of his own; a band of personal adherents who imitated him in his

dress and talk and ways, who deferred to him, flattered him, and admired him fully as much as he had the shining lights around which he had himself revolved when he was young. This homage did not do him any great good. It confirmed him in the high opinion he had formed of himself: it indorsed and justified his aspirations, which were now by no means unambitious, although very carefully concealed. Why should he not make a brilliant marriage? There were plenty of heiresses about; if he could but find one in whom the charms of blood and beauty were united, why should he not go in and win? He was still comparatively young; he had kept his figure; he was *répandu* in the best society and appreciated wherever he went. Who should have a better chance? And what might he not achieve in the way of future

distinction with a rich and well-born wife to help him in climbing the tree?

These ideas had been uppermost in his mind for some time past. It was in obedience to them that he had been at some pains to inform himself whether any likely *partis* were running loose about Trigger-town or in the country round. But he had so far met with little success. Hopshire is a county owning many families of antiquity and repute, but none were especially renowned for their wealth. Diggle would have gone further afield and commenced his chase in London, or at one of the great watering places, but he wished first to exhaust the resources of the neighbourhood. The gay major was not wrong in supposing that he showed off to the best advantage upon his own territory, doing the honours of his own mess, backed up and supported

by so many brilliant comrades and disciples. Just when he began to despair of finding any young lady who from substantial reasons was entitled to receive his addresses, he came across the Farringtons. They lived at the other end of the county. There was a daughter in the house—a very charming girl, he thought, who, having one brother only and no sisters, would assuredly be well portioned. This led him to consolidate his acquaintance with Sir Rupert, to accept many invitations and pay frequent visits to Farrington Hall.

It was entirely through his advice and intervention that Sir Rupert sent young Ernest into the Duke's Own. The regiment would probably remain at Triggertown for a year or two longer, and this would break Lady Farrington gradually to the separation from her beloved son. Be-

sides, Major Cavendish-Diggle would have the young fellow especially under his wing—a precious advantage no doubt, as we shall presently see.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE BARRACK-ROOM.

WITHIN twenty-four hours of his arrival in barracks, Herbert Larkins was bathed, cropped, clothed, numbered, and, so to speak, put away. His 'rags,' in plain English, his civilian clothes—invariably so called whether undeniable garments or veritable rags—had been exchanged for uniform, such as it was. A recruit, and especially in the fall of the year, when the annual issue of new clothing is near at hand, gets only things 'part worn.' So Herbert's shell jacket, his regimental trousers, and his ammunition boots, were all of them palpable misfits.

He said as much to the corporal of the

pioneers, who helped the quartermaster-sergeant in rigging out recruits.

‘Too large?’ replied the corporal, contemptuously. ‘Wait till you’re at the extension motions, or at club drill, and you’ll wish they were more than twice as big.’

‘But my trousers are too long, and—’

‘It’ll be longer before you get another pair. Besides, you ain’t done growing yet. Two months on full rations, and you’ll be as tall as a hop-pole. How do you think your legs ’d look then? Showing half a yard of sock above the high-lows, and the captain ’d be safe to put you down for a new pair of bags.’

‘And these boots are far too loose. I can’t feel the sides even.’

‘You’ll feel something else afore long, I can tell you, and not half so soft as leather. Them boots! Why, flash Alick Nokes wore

them till he went "out"—and it 'd take a dozen Johnny Raws like you to make half a soldier such as him.'

Yet Herbert had really some reason to be discontented with his personal appearance. Always a trim and dapper youth, his patroness, Lady Farrington, had loved to see him neatly dressed, and had cheerfully paid his tailor's bills when at Deadham school. But now, speaking exactly, he was not dressed at all; his figure was only concealed with clothes. His jacket was baggy at the back; the arms were so long that the cuffs came as far as his knuckles; his trousers, if they had been tied in at the ankle, would have suited a Janissary Turk; his forage-cap—it was before the days of smart glengarries—not yet 'blocked' and set up, fell like a black pudding-bag, over one forehead and one ear. His boots were

quite amorphous, quite without form, and they might have been void were it not probable they encased a pair of feet shaped like wedges of Cheshire cheese. So deteriorating was the effect of these incongruous habiliments, that Herbert Larkins seemed to lose his erect bearing and springy step; and as he reached the barrack-room, to which he was presently marched, carrying his kit-bag full of cleaning utensils under one arm, and his new knapsack under the other, he hung his head and looked utterly ashamed of himself.

‘Oh! it’s you is it?’ said the sergeant in charge of the room, who took him over from the corporal of the pioneers.

Herbert recognised the sergeant with whom he had had the colloquy at the barrack-gate.

‘So you got past the gate, did you?’

Mind you stop, now you've got in. Don't try and run off again with your bounty and kit.'

The suspicious sergeant scented a probable deserter.

'I shouldn't have come in if I'd wanted to go out directly afterwards,' Herbert plucked up courage to say; but the scene was so new, and he felt so forlorn in his loneliness and his strange new clothes, that he had not much spirit left in him.

'Don't answer me with cheek,' cried the sergeant, very sharply. 'I want none of your slack jaw or back jaw. Hold your tongue, that's what you've got to do, and do as you're bid.'

'Now look here,' he went on, after a pause; 'there's your bed, and that's your shelf; mind you keep them clean and proper. Don't you try to lie down on the one before the right time, nor put what ain't

authorised on the other. You'll be for recruits' drill at six sharp to-morrow; don't let me have to tell you twice to turn out, and mind you don't get straying away so that you can't answer your name at tattoo roll-call to-night. Mind, too, what your comrade says; I'll tell you off to Boy Hanlon because you're much of an age; mind him and what he tells you, and he'll keep you straight. Lads'—this to the room—'have any of you seen "the Boy"?'

'No, sergeant, not these hours past. He's in the usual place, I'll go bail.'

'The canteen?'

Some of the men laughed and nodded, and the sergeant went off in search.

No one took any notice of Herbert, as he sat upon the edge of his iron cot at the far end of the room. Everybody seemed busy with his own affairs.

But presently some one near the door shouted, 'Why, here's "the Boy"! Duke's Own! "'Tchun,"' giving the word of command as though an officer was approaching.

It was only a wizened little man, who might have been fifty or barely five. He hadn't a hair on his fresh coloured cheeks, but they were much wrinkled as though he were prematurely aged.

Boy Hanlon was one of the oldest soldiers in the regiment. He had been in it all his life from the time they had picked him up like a waif or stray on the line of march between Exeter and Plymouth till now, when he had upwards of twenty years' service, and was growing grey-haired. He had begun as a boy in the band, thence he went to the drums; by-and-bye he became a bugler, from which, although barely of

the standard height, he had been passed into the ranks. Now, as a veteran who knew his rights and what was due to himself, he gave himself great airs. No one was half so well acquainted as he was with professional topics. He could tell you the names of all the officers past and present, in the Duke's Own; he was a keen critic upon drill from his own point of view—somewhere in the rear rank of one of the central companies; he could pipeclay belts to perfection, and had not his equal with brass ball, heel ball, boot-blackening, button stick and brush. But the chief source of his pride were his confidential relations with Colonel Prioleau, the present commanding officer. The two had 'soldiered' together all these years, in every clime, and knew each other thoroughly. More, they had stood side by side at the battle of Goo-

jerat, where the Duke's Own had fought remarkably well, and they were the only two survivors of that glorious day. 'Boy' Hanlon—he got his soubriquet of course from his insignificant size—traded a good deal on that battle of Goojerat. He was perpetually celebrating the victory. For one single battle it had an extraordinary number of anniversaries. Whenever 'the Boy' was thirsty—and with him drought was perennial—he turned up at the orderly room and told the colonel it was a fine morning 'for the day.'

'What day?' old Prioleau would ask with pretended ignorance, although he knew and really enjoyed the joke.

'The great day, of course, colonel; the day of Goojerat.'

'Why, it was that only three weeks ago; surely—'

‘Well, sir, we’re the only two Goojeraties left, you know, sir, and I’d like to drink your health.’

It always ended in the same way—the transfer of half-a-crown from the colonel to ‘the Boy;’ the speedy exchange of the whole sum into liquor, the most potent description preferred, a free fight, for ‘the Boy’ was quarrelsome in his cups, a temporary relegation to the guard-room, from which he was sure to be immediately released by the officer of the day. When Hanlon misconducted himself he always got off scot free. Colonel Prioleau would never punish ‘the Boy.’

‘Where’s my towney?’ Hanlon asked directly he entered the room.

They pointed to where Herbert sat disconsolate; and the dapper little soldier, who was still trim in figure, and straight as a

dart, walked over to the lad and gave him a friendly pat on the back.

‘Now, young chap, you must brush up, brush up, and show yourself a man. We’ve to be comrades, you and I, and it won’t suit me to consort with a chap as is given to peek and pine. What do you call yourself?’

This was delicately put. Recruits do not always enlist under their own names; so Hanlon asked, not what Herbert was called, but what he called himself.

‘Herbert Larkins.’

‘Good; and not a bad looking chap either. Too tall — leastwise I’m afraid you’re going to grow—’

Hanlon, like many little men, hated those whose inches far exceeded his own. In the days when there had been grenadiers, it was his favourite pastime, when at all the

worse for liquor, to beard the giants in their own barrack-room. He called them ‘hop-poles,’ ‘sand-bags,’ ‘wooden ramrods,’ and other opprobrious names, and his onslaughts generally ended in his being carried, bodily, to the guard-room, under some stalwart soldier’s arm. Now that the grenadier company was abolished, he disseminated his dislike, and abused every private who was more than five feet six in height.

‘Too tall, unless you stop as you are. Gin perhaps’d do it; or whiskey; or perhaps “four” ale—if you took enough of it. Fond of “four” ale, eh?’

Hanlon’s eyes glistened with a toper’s joy as he mentioned his favourite fluid.

‘Ah! there’s nothing like “four” ale. I’m under stoppages myself,’ he went on, meditatively, ‘or I’d stand treat. But you’ll

have got your bounty, and the money for your "coloured" clothes. You ain't got the price of a glass about you?'

Herbert admitted readily enough that he had the price of several. He had lost none of his schoolboy freehandedness, and he had moreover the wit to see that his new comrade might, if propitiated, prove an uncommonly useful friend.

Hanlon first made Herbert swallow some piping hot tea which was brought in just then, and gave him the whole of his 'tea' bread; Hanlon's own appetite was indifferent; and then the two, amid the winks and jeers of the rest, strolled over to the canteen. The place was not over full. Nothing stronger than ale and porter could be sold in it, and the Duke's Own generally preferred the Triggertown taverns. So would Hanlon, but he knew that a newly

enlisted recruit would not be permitted to leave barracks.

They had a quart ‘of the best;’ Hanlon called for it—and drank it, all but a glass; a second quart followed, and a third; and as the little veteran became more and more steeped in liquor he grew more and more communicative. He told Herbert all about the regiment; who were the chief personages in it; he spoke with awe of the sergeant-major, but of the colonel as a familiar friend. He described the ways of the officers, the habits and customs of the regiment, the chances there were of promotion for a smart lad who’d had any schooling and knew how to keep himself straight. ‘Can you read? good—and write? better still. If you can only cipher and do accounts you won’t have long to wait for a lance stripe. I’ll get it for you, aye and

more too. I'll get you put in the orderly-room as a clerk, or perhaps the pay office. You shall be a colour-sergeant before you're many years older; who knows, perhaps you'll be sergeant-major afore you die. All through Joe Hanlon; poor old Joe Hanlon—Letshavesmoreale.'

From Hanlon drunk to Hanlon sober there was a great distance. The big promises he made so freely in his cups were all of them forgotten next day. Yet the little man was, in his way, a good friend to Herbert Larkins. In the days, arduous and often wearisome, of the recruit's novitiate, the old soldier acted always as mentor and adviser. He taught Herbert all he knew. He helped him with his exercises, rehearsing the manual and platoon in the privacy of the citadel ditch, so that Herbert soon won especial favour with the

drill instructor of his squad; he took a pride in Herbert's personal appearance, arranged a 'swop' for the misfitting jacket and highlows, contracted with one of the regimental tailors to alter the baggy trousers in his spare hours.

'I'll make you the smartest soldier in the Duke's Own,' said 'the Boy' enthusiastically. 'You're the right stuff; you've got it in you; you're a soldier born, every inch. I don't ask no questions. I don't want to know who you are, or where you comes from, but you've got soldier's blood in you; you come of a soldier's stock, I'll wager a gallon of the best four ale. I like you, lad. You're free handed and open spoken, and you've got an honest mug of your own. I like you, and I'll stick to you through thick and thin.'

The advantages of Boy Hanlon's counsel

and protection were soon apparent. Herbert, thanks to Hanlon's coaching, but aided not a little by his own native intelligence, and the excellent education he had received, proved an apt scholar in the military school. He soon learnt his drill, and was passed for duty much more quickly than was usually the case with recruits. Mr. Farrington, who had commenced drill at the same time, but who enjoyed the officer's privilege of taking it easy, and who was somewhat slow of apprehension to boot, was still at company drill when Private Larkins, fully accoutred, and admirably 'turned out,' took his place in the ranks on guard, mounting parade.

It was with a beating heart that he found Mr. Wheeler, the adjutant, in making his minute and critical inspection, pause just in front of him.

‘Fall out,’ said the adjutant curtly; and Herbert scarcely knew whether to expect praise or blame.

‘Colonel’s orderly. Report yourself at his quarters after parade.’

Here was an honour indeed! To be selected on his first guard-mounting parade, as commanding officer’s orderly—a post which, apart from the privileges it brought of immunity from ‘sentry go’ and a sure night’s rest in bed, every private soldier in the regiment coveted and esteemed—was a compliment which Herbert, and Hanlon also, appreciated to the full.

What befell the young orderly at Colonel Prioleau’s quarters must be reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER VII.

A FRENCH LESSON.

HERBERT LARKINS presented himself with some trepidation at the commanding officer's quarters, a house outside, but not far from the barracks. The hall door was wide open, but he did not go in. The man whom he relieved told him 'to patrol up and down in front of the house—that was all he had to do.'

This he did religiously for half an hour or more, and then he heard himself called from within.

'Orderly!' A clear, sweet voice it was; very musical in its intonation and very different from the gruff accents to which he had most recently been accustomed.

‘Orderly!’ again; this time much more sharply spoken, and with undoubted petulance. ‘How stupid! Why don’t you come when you’re called?’ and then the owner of the voice appeared. Mahomet had come to the mountain.

A bright-faced beautiful child; a fair golden-haired girl, not yet in her teens, wearing a fresh pink and white frock, with pink ribbons in her sunny locks, and a pink silk handkerchief tied like a shawl over her shoulders and neck. Herbert took it all in at a glance, and remembered the picture for the rest of his life.

A very imperious young person, evidently; she had honest kindly eyes, but her small nose slightly ‘tip tilted,’ and the upward curve of scorn in her lip indicated a proud, haughty nature, and the wilfulness of one who, though still a child, had every-

thing always her own way. An only child, born late in their married life, Edith Priorleau ruled languid mother and doting father with a despotism against which they had neither the inclination nor power to protest.

‘Are you the orderly?’ she asked, almost stamping her foot.

‘Yes.’

‘Yes? Yes—what?’

‘Yes, I am.’

‘Yes, *Miss*, you should say when you speak to me. Do you know who *I* am? I am the colonel’s daughter.’

Whereat Herbert drew himself up, and saluted her formally with hand to cap, as though she were the commander-in-chief.

‘You’re only a recruit, I suppose?’ She spoke quite contemptuously. ‘I never saw you before. I don’t like strangers. I shall

‘speak to Mr. Wheeler about it. How long have you been dismissed drill?’

Herbert smiled at her intimate acquaintance with military details, and the smile seemed to give her fresh annoyance.

‘You’re a rude soldier. You shan’t come as orderly again. But here’—she remembered what she wanted—‘take this list to the barrack library; be quick, please, and bring me all those books. I want them at once, please, all. You understand? At once, and all; and when you come back bring them in to me—there in the back room.’

‘Edith!’ said another voice just then, faintly and querulously, ‘you are losing the whole morning. Your French—’

‘Oh, bother!’ cried Edith, and retired, dragging one foot after the other, as though loth to return to her studies.

Herbert executed his commission promptly enough, and presently returned laden with books—some, but not all, of those for which Edith had sent. He carried them straight into the back room.

‘I am sorry to say, miss, that the “Loss of the Wager” is out, and so is Maxwell’s “Stories of Waterloo,” but I have brought you “Thaddeus of Warsaw” and the “Romance of War.”’

Then he stopped short, for he saw that the young lady was not attending to him in the least. Her head was buried in her hands, and when she eventually looked up her eyes were suffused with tears.

‘Oh, dear, it is so hard. I can’t make head or tail of it.’

It was only a French exercise after all, about which there was all this coil. But Edith was not an industrious scholar. In

plain English, she hated books, and would any day throw them aside to get on her pony to scamper across the Hopshire downs, or ride out to the drill-field with her father, or to stand by at band practice, or accompany the regiment when it marched out.

‘I know a little French,’ said Herbert diffidently; ‘perhaps I can help?’

Edith stared at him through her tears. A private soldier know French! More, probably, than she knew herself! The notion filled her with amazement — with gratitude, perhaps, but also with chagrin.

But when, after a few minutes’ close application, he untied the terrible knot, gratitude overpowered all other sentiments, and she could have shaken hands with him —almost—in her glee.

‘It’s most extraordinary,’ she cried, dancing about the room with delight. ‘I

never heard of such a thing; you're the most wonderful orderly—'

'You seem very merry, Miss E.,' said an officer who put his head into the room just then.

'Oh, Major Diggle! Just look here.' And in a few words, volubly spoken, she explained what had occurred.

'So you know French, do you?' said the major to Herbert, in a supercilious tone impossible to describe. 'And Latin and Greek perhaps, and Hebrew?'

'No, sir, not Hebrew.' Herbert had drawn himself up straight, and stood correctly at 'attention.' He had already learnt the lesson of respect due to an officer, and was fully conscious of the great gulf which separated the major from the private soldier.

'What's your name? Larkins? Where

were you at school? When did you enlist? And why?’

Herbert answered all these questions except the last.

‘You don’t choose to tell that, eh? Oh, with all my heart. It’s none of my business. But now, if Miss Prioleau does not want you—that will do; you can go.’

Herbert saluted, and walked off.

Directly the door was shut, the major turned to Edith, and said,

‘You ought not to be so familiar with private soldiers. You mustn’t do that again, Miss E.’

‘I shall do as I please, and don’t choose to be called Miss E., Major Diggle.’

He equally hated to be called Diggle without the Cavendish.

‘I shall tell the colonel,’ he said rather angrily, as he left the room.

She only made a face after him when he had gone, as though she did not care a bit what he did. There was no love lost between these two. The child, with intuitive perception, disliked the *parvenu's* pretentious airs. He thought her, *en revanche*, a very pert and forward child, who ought to be snubbed and kept in her place. There were one or two old feuds between them, too. He had accused her, although she hotly repudiated the charge, of telling tales. He had caught her, he declared, looking out of the windows, to see and tell her father what officers came late for parade. She, on the other hand, had discovered, and had announced her discovery openly, that he wore—not a wig—but one of Unwin and Albert's coverings for bald heads; and Diggle, who was proud of his looks, did not like it at all.

It was not likely, therefore, that any friend of Edith's would find much favour with the major. But even if she had been disposed to champion the erudite recruit, so young and obscure a soldier was really beneath the notice of the great Cavendish Diggle. By-and-bye Herbert might prove a thorn in the major's side, and give him many anxious hours—but that time was still to come.

Meanwhile, Herbert Larkins pursued the even tenour of his ways, taking the rough with the smooth, but finding that the first considerably preponderated. What he lacked most were congenial companions and agreeable occupation for his idle hours. Herbert found the time hang very heavy on his hands. He could not bring himself to spend hours with Joe Hanlon in the canteen; nor, indeed, did 'the Boy' wish

him to do so. Hanlon was ambitious for his young comrade, and he knew the way to preferment too well to encourage Herbert to take to drink. There was nothing left by way of amusement, after all needful polishing and cleaning-up was done, but patrolling the Triggertown streets, and frequenting such ginshops and music-halls as suffered private soldiers in the Queen's uniform to pass their doors.

Herbert, as a last resource, turned bookworm. He had attended the regimental school as in duty bound; but it was soon very clear that a regimental schoolmaster, however well certificated, could not teach an ex-sixth-form boy very much. Herbert passed all the required standards, and was very quickly dismissed as a prodigy of learning. He might indeed have obtained a billet as an assistant teacher in the school,

but Joe Hanlon supported him in his refusal of the post. There would be much better openings for him later on, and in the regular line. All he had to do was to wait patiently for his 'lance stripe,' and this he was certain to obtain so soon as he had completed the twelve months' service from the time of joining, which was the usual time of probation in the Duke's Own.

The books he read he got from the barrack library, a place well stocked enough, but not with volumes covering a wide range of subjects. After exhausting the list of good works of fiction and travel, he felt himself fortunate at finding 'Lecky's Rise and Progress of Rationalism in Europe.'

One day when Herbert was absent on guard, a volume of this was lying upon his shelf—in the wrong place—and the captain, who was inspecting the rooms, noticed it.

‘It’s that Larkins, sir.’ His old enemy the gate sergeant, Sergeant Pepper, spoke. ‘A young soldier, sir. Very careless young fellow, sir. No use *my* speaking to him, sir. Better have his name put on the gate, sir?’

‘Let me see the book. “Lecky”? Strange! a recruit, do you say? What’s he like? Smart? Send him over to my quarters to-morrow.’

Captain Greathed was an officer of a somewhat uncommon type. Thoughtful, studious, steady, he concealed under a quiet demeanour a true soldierly spirit and keen professional ambition. He yearned secretly for military distinction, and only bided his time. Meanwhile he read and pondered deeply the lessons of the past. He had mastered military literature in all its branches. Had he chosen, he might have entered the

Staff College with ease, and would certainly have passed through it with distinction; but he was too fond of his regiment to care to leave it even to study or to serve upon the staff. He took an interest too in his men, which was more than many of his brother officers did.

‘I sent for you, Larkins,’ he said to Herbert, ‘to see what you are made of. You are reading “Lecky;” do you understand it? Have you read any other books of the kind?’

‘I was always fond of philosophic reading.’

‘You have been well educated, then? You are the man, I suppose, who did Miss Prioleau’s French lesson for her?’ That story had soon got about. ‘Well, that’s not everything; let’s see how much you know,’ and Captain Greathed put a series

of questions to him which soon tested the extent of his learning.

‘You ought to do well enough, but book-lore is not everything. You look strong. Are you active? Are you good at gymnastics? Can you play cricket, and walk and run well? Try you? We will. Meanwhile keep straight and steady, and you’ll do. It’ll be your own fault if you don’t get on.’

From that time forth Captain Greathed took especial notice of Herbert, spoke to him frequently—an honour highly prized by the private soldier—advised him as to his reading, and lent him military books. All this did not pass unobserved in the company, and it soon became evident that his comrades rather resented the captain’s undisguised preference for Larkins. The body of the men in the Duke’s Own were not

particularly attached to their officers, and to be a favourite with superiors was not a certain passport to popularity with the rank and file. Herbert, in spite of Boy Hanlon's championship, found himself kept at arm's length rather, and often subjected to innuendoes and sneers.

One day there was some commotion in the barrack-room. Several men who had been slovenly on parade had had their 'passes' stopped. These permits to be absent from quarters after hours are much appreciated, and those who had forfeited them were naturally sore. Herbert, who wished to attend a lecture at the Mechanics' Institute, had also 'put in a pass,' backed by the captain, which had been granted, much to the disgust of the other men.

'It's a burning shame,' said one; and

others followed on the same side, but with louder and coarser expletives.

‘A young jiggermy-dandy like you,’ cried a big soldier, Jubbock by name, who had the reputation of being cock and bully of the company. ‘What right have you to what’s denied your betters? A sneaking young lickspittle, who’s got the length of the captain’s foot. I’ll teach you to—’

Jubbock advanced towards him with a threatening air.

‘Well?’ said Herbert coolly, ‘what’ll you teach me?’

‘To know your master. Take that,’ and Jubbock aimed a tremendous blow at Herbert, which the latter promptly parried, and with a smart ‘one—two’ put the great fellow flat on his back.

There was a shout in the barrack-room as Jubbock rose furious and closed with his

opponent. Then came a hubbub of voices. 'The sergeant, the sergeant! Sergeant Pepper, the "Real Cayenne!"' as he was commonly called when he looked like mischief.

'What's this? Quarrelling in the barrack-room? I'll not have it. Drop it. Who began it? You, Larkins? Then to the guard-room you'll go, double quick. Here, Corporal Smirke, get a file of men.'

'But t'other chap rasperated him,' Hanlon put in. 'Jubbock's more to blame than Larkins. If you shop one you must shop the other.'

'So I will. I'll run them both in—march them off.'

And so Herbert, with a smarting sense of injustice, found himself relegated to the guard-house, and locked up for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ORDER BOOK.

HERBERT woke after a troubled night's rest, disturbed by the occasional irruption of comrades brought in by the piquet and patrols, in various stages of intoxication, and the visits of the sergeant of the guard. The bare boards had been his bed, and he ached in every limb. It was with a sense of relief almost, although he dreaded the ordeal before him, that he washed and cleaned himself up preparatory to taking his place in the ranks with the rest of 'the prisoners.' With them, under escort of the guard, he was presently marched to the orderly-room, and then, after waiting half-an-hour for his turn, he was marched into the presence of

his commanding officer, to answer for his alleged crime.

He and Jubbock appeared together before their judge, Colonel Prioleau. The sergeant, who was the only witness, gave his evidence fairly, although not without a bias against Herbert, but the Colonel withheld judgment till he heard the defence.

‘What have you got to say?’ he asked of both abruptly.

‘Please, your honour,’ began Jubbock, ‘we wasn’t fighting at all; we was only wrastling. This young chap says, says he, he knew a thing or two about the Cumberland cropper, and I, says I, know’d more about the Hampshire hug; and with that we had a set-to, and the sergeant found us at it.’

The old soldier’s tendency to misstatement—to call it by no stronger name—was very repugnant to honest Herbert.

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ he put in, ‘he is not telling you the truth. We *were* fighting. He struck me, and I knocked him down.’

Colonel looked up a little curiously. Herbert’s accent and his language were both more accurate than one is accustomed to find in a private soldier.

‘You did, did you? And would you do it again?’

‘I would, sir, if he provoked me; I’m not afraid of him,’ cried Herbert, hotly.

‘He’d better try,’ Jubbock said, growing also warm, notwithstanding the awe inspired by the great man in whose presence he stood.

‘It’s quite evident you can’t agree. There’s bad blood between you still. Well, you know the old rule—no, Captain Greathed, I won’t hear a word—young sol-

diers must find their level, and hold their own. Besides, there is the old regimental custom. You must fight it out. Send them down to the main ditch, as usual, and let the orderly sergeant go with them to see fair play. It's no use talking to me, Captain Greathed; I shall stick to the old rule of the Duke's Own so long as I am commanding the corps.'

Captain Greathed thought it wisest to let matters take their course. Any further interference to protect Herbert might have looked like favouritism, and have done the young fellow more harm than good. He may have thought, too, that Herbert could give a good account of his antagonist.

The mill was conducted according to custom, in semi-official fashion. The orderly sergeant, as before said, and two

bottle-holders—Hanlon was Herbert's—were the only spectators.

For a long time it seemed a close affair. Jubbock's weight and great reach of arm were immensely in his favour. But Herbert had more science. Self-defence, although fast becoming an old-fashioned art, was not unknown at Deadham School, and he had grown into an accomplished practitioner in it. He was lighter, too, and far more active than Jubbock, and this told in the long run. His adversary tried in vain to get at him; but Herbert danced around him like a cork, till by degrees Jubbock lost all patience and struck out wildly. The wily Herbert promptly seized his advantage, and began to punish Jubbock severely. After this the victory was not long in doubt. At the end of the fourteenth round, Jubbock

threw up the sponge, and Herbert was declared, officially, to have won the day.

The result of the fight, noised about as it was in the company, naturally added greatly to Herbert's prestige. Jubbock was a coarse, rough fellow, inclined to be brutal and overbearing, and he had so long tyrannised over his comrades that his defeat was hailed with much satisfaction. 'The Boy'—old Joe Hanlon—was wild with delight. He was never tired of expatiating upon Herbert's prowess, and talked so much about it, taking so much credit to himself, that you might have thought it was he who had won the fight.

Herbert received even higher approval.

'So I hear you held your own,' the captain had said to him one day. 'I thought it was not unlikely you would. But don't be puffed up by your victory. Take heed

to your going—Jubbock's not likely to love you the more because you have shown yourself the better man.'

There was wisdom in this advice. Jubbock bore malice, as Herbert soon found, from his sulky demeanour and the way he scowled when he dared. Hanlon too reported that Jubbock had sworn to be even with young Larkins yet. But what could he do? Herbert laughed such vague threats to scorn.

It was not long after this that unpleasant rumours became rife in the barrack-room. It was clear that the occupants thereof were not all loyal to one another. The men missed things. First, odds and ends disappeared. A button-brush, a comb, a tin of blacking or a red herring bought for tea. Then money went—pence, not too plentiful with soldiers, and hoarded up

between pay-days, in cleaning bag or knapsack, to be drawn upon as required for the men's *menus plaisirs*.

There was evidently a thief in the room.

'Yes: and he's got to be found out too,' said Joe Hanlon. 'There ain't been such a thing known in the Duke's Own these years past.'

'No, nor wouldn't be now,' said another, 'if we got honest lads as recruits. We want no swell-mobsmen and high-falutin dandies with their grand airs, and their fine talk, who come from no one knows where.'

'What d'ye mean?' asked Hanlon sharply. 'If that's a slap at my towney, I give you the lie, and no two words about it. Larkins is as honest a young chap as ever took the shilling.'

'Well, Jubbock said—'

‘It’s just what I thought,’ said ‘the Boy.’ ‘Jubbock means mischief, but I’ll circumvent him, or my name’s not Joe Hanlon.’

Matters were presently brought to a crisis. Two half-crowns, a shilling and some coppers were stolen on the day following pay-day, and the men were growing furious.

‘I’d swear to my half-crown anywhere,’ said one victim. ‘It had a twist at the edges and a scar on the Queen’s nose.’

‘Let’s all agree to be searched—our kits, and packs, and all.’

‘Yes, yes,’ everybody cried. ‘We’ll call the colour-sergeant, and do it all regular and proper, so we will.’

There was a general stampede out of the room. Jubbock only was left in it, and Hanlon, who had been shaving behind the door, and was not visible.

The men came trooping back, headed by the colour-sergeant—a stout, consequential little man, who felt that his position was only second in dignity to that of the commander-in-chief.

‘No man must leave the room. You, Corporal Closky, see to that. Now, Sergeant Limpetter, we’ll take the beds with their kits as they come.’

The search was regularly and carefully conducted amid a decorous silence.

All at once there was a loud shout. The money had been discovered in one of the packs.

It was Herbert’s.

‘Larkins,’ cried the colour-sergeant, ‘I’d never have believed it.’

There was a hubbub of voices, the prominent expressions being, ‘I told you so,’ or ‘What did I say?’ followed by a hoarse

shout for vengeance, for condign punishment of the despicable thief.

‘A court-martial! a barrack-room court-martial,’ cried several men in a breath, and the cry was taken up by the room.

‘Stop! Give the lad fair play,’ said a new voice, and Joe Hanlon stepped from behind the door.

‘Why, what do you know about it?’ the colour-sergeant asked. ‘Isn’t the evidence as straight as it can be? He was all but taken in the act. The money, which is sworn to, is found in his pack.’

‘Aye, but who put it there?’

‘Himself, of course. Who else?’ It was Jubbock who spoke.

‘You did. I saw you.’

The shot told. Jubbock visibly quailed.

‘It’s a lie. I’ll swear I never touched the pack; I’m ready to take my dying oath—’

‘I saw you, man; I was there, behind the door, shaving, and you thought you was all alone’st in the room. I saw you go to Larkins’ bed, take the money out of your pocket, wrap it in a rag, and put it in Larkins’ pack.’

‘I didn’t, I swear.’

‘After all, it’s only one man’s word against another’s,’ said the colour-sergeant, magisterially.

‘How else could it have got there? Don’t you know,’ Hanlon asked of Jubbock, ‘don’t you know that Larkins is in hospital, and been there these three days past? How could he have touched the pack? He’s not been in the room for three days or more.’

‘That’s right,’ said the colour-sergeant. ‘There’s no more to be said. Jubbock, I would not be in your shoes. You must go to the guard-room.’

‘No, no, no;’ the men were all furious. ‘He’s the thief, the mean hound. Let’s settle it ourselves. A court-martial, a barrack-room court-martial, sergeant.’

‘Well, have it your own way. Here, Snaggs, Cusack, Hippisley, and Muldoon, you’re the four oldest soldiers in the company; go into my bunk and talk it over. Say what’s to be done with him.’

They came back presently.

‘He’s guilty. Three dozen with the sling of his own rifle; that’s our sentence—’

‘Which I approve,’ said the colour-sergeant, and the informal punishment was forthwith administered in a way which would have gladdened the heart of the fiercest old martinet who ever told the drummer to lay on.

Herbert heard all about it, as soon as

he came out of hospital, and was not sorry for the villain who had so nearly led him into a terrible scrape. Had the case been proved against him it would have ruined him utterly, for now at length promotion, humble enough, but still advancement, was close at hand. Within a week or two the regimental orders contained a notification that Private Herbert Larkins, of F company, was appointed a lance-corporal.

This raised him at once above the malevolence of enemies such as Jubbock. But it gave him work enough for half a dozen. The lance-corporal, the junior grade of non-commissioned officer, is a sort of general utility man, whose duties begin at daylight and do not end at night. He must be always clean and well dressed, or adieu to hope of further promotion. He must be at the beck and call of the company sergeants,

and ready to fly for the sergeant-major. He must be peremptory yet judicious with the privates, whom, although he was one himself yesterday, he is called upon now to command. Difficult, not to say arduous, as were his functions, Herbert managed to discharge them to the satisfaction of his superiors, and soon became known in the regiment as a smart and intelligent young man.

One evening it fell to his lot to take the 'order book' round for the perusal of the officers of the company. Ernest Farrington was one of them, and in due course Herbert came to his quarters. He knocked and heard the usual 'Come in.'

'Orders, sir.'

'Orders! All right. One moment—'
'Yes, sir; that's all I know about it,' went on young Farrington, in continuation evi-

dently of a previous talk. His interlocutor was Major Cavendish-Diggle.

‘You don’t know what became of Lady Farrington? Where is she?’

‘At a private asylum—Dr. Plum’s, at Greystone, the other end of the county, you know.’

‘To be sure. It must have given Sir Rupert great annoyance. But now it’s all happily settled, of course?’

Diggle was just then making the running for Miss Farrington, and wished to be quite certain that there was no fear of future disinheritance.

‘Absolutely,’ said Ernest. ‘The crazy old creature won’t be heard of again, probably.’

‘Shall I leave the order book, sir?’ Herbert then asked, and they remembered they were not alone. They little

guessed who their listener was, and how much they had inadvertently revealed to him.

He had long wished to ascertain the whereabouts of his kind patroness, and now he knew. What use he might make of the information did not occur to him. After all, what could a poor soldier do against such a powerful enemy as Sir Rupert Farrington? Still the mouse helped the lion. And it was something to know exactly what had become of poor Lady Farrington. If he could but come across the Larkins, there might be some hope of his re-establishing himself, perhaps of again putting forward his claims. But the only reply he received from the War Office, to which he had written, was that Sergeant Larkins was employed as a barrack-sergeant abroad, and could not at the moment be traced. He

must wait, that was clear. But everything comes to him who can wait, and Herbert was still young enough to be sanguine and full of hope.

CHAPTER IX.

A BALL IN BARRACKS.

THE first of September was a great day always at Farrington Hall. Sir Rupert preserved very strictly; he was fond of shooting, and his coverts were always well stocked. They had a large party in the house; men chiefly, good guns who could be relied upon to do their share in swelling the Farrington 'bag.'

This year several of Ernest's brother officers were to have been invited, but Major Diggle manœuvred so cleverly that none of them were asked but himself. He had his own reasons for keeping men away from the Hall. He was not afraid of rivals, of course—who among the Duke's Own was

there to compete with him? Still they might inadvertently interfere with his little game; and he preferred, at least for the present, to have the field all to himself.

Major Cavendish-Diggle was much appreciated at the Hall. Lady Farrington, a foolish, inconsequent woman, who was entirely wrapped up in Ernest, her only son, received the Major almost with effusion. He had been, oh, so kind to Ernest! She knew it; it was no use his disclaiming it, and she was deeply grateful to him.

‘Ith thutch a trial joining a regiment; everything tho thrange, and Erney tho young, tho inexperienced; he would have been mitherable, quite mitherable, but for *you*.’

Lady Farrington was a large fair woman; so fair as to be almost colourless. Her manner was not without distinction, and

would have been impressive but for the vapidness of her remarks, and a trick of utterance due, seemingly, to her having too many teeth in her mouth, which robbed her words of anything like expression, and sometimes made them unintelligible. Ernest, her son, greatly took after her. He was tall, but rather shambling in gait, and still excessively thin. In voice and manner of speech he reproduced Lady Farrington exactly. His mouth also seemed full of hot potatoes, or too full of teeth; and as he had a trick of keeping it constantly open, as though to cool the potatoes, or air his teeth, his general expression was vacuous in the extreme. A rather full lower lip and a very receding chin did not add to his personal charms. You gathered at once from his face and air that he was weak, irresolute, easily led, and that he

might, if misled, slide soon into vicious ways.

But he had improved wonderfully since he had joined the Duke's Own. They all said so. Even Sir Rupert, dark and undemonstrative as he was generally, thawed enough to say that he thought soldiering would make a man of Ernest—if anything would. Letitia, as Miss Farrington was called, and who in many respects resembled her father, changed her tone on seeing how much Ernest was changed for the better. Her attitude towards him had hitherto been one of patronage mixed with spite. Although outwardly she was very affectionate—in her heart she bore him a grudge because he was one of the sex commonly called superior to her own. She was the elder by three or four years; she had far more brains—‘not that that was surprising’

—as she said when she was more than usually venomous, seeing that Ernest had next to none. She was a Farrington, as was evident from her likeness to her father, while her brother was clearly a Burdakin, like his mother. Why should an absurd and monstrously unfair custom constitute him the heir and future head of the family, while she must be satisfied with what her father might choose to give her as a marriage portion or as a settlement for life? She had always bitterly resented the Salic law as it obtained in England with regard to the succession of estates and titles.

Letitia was, however, much more civil to Ernest now. There may be many subtle reasons for such sudden changes of demeanour. Major Cavendish-Diggle was perhaps not remotely connected with Letitia's. He was Ernest's bosom friend; what if he pre-

sently developed into a friend and admirer of her own? Letitia was not exactly ill-favoured, but she was certainly not a beauty in the strict sense of the term. Dark complexioned and thin lipped, but with a nose too sharp, and cheek bones too high, her face was not strikingly attractive to say the least of it; and the fact was being gradually borne in upon her, as she grew on in years, by the slackness with which suitors sought her hand. Major Cavendish-Diggle was one of the first who showed better taste. Why should not men admire her? She had a neat well-proportioned figure. Her eyes were good, of the deep brown piercing order; her dark hair was abundant and rich. She was a good talker, had all the accomplishments of a well-educated young lady, and a large share of that indescribable air of good breeding, of that perfect ease in

manner and thorough *savoir faire*, which are only to be seen in women of good station—all of which Diggle felt would be extremely becoming in a colonel's or general officer's wife. If the thin lips and fierce eyes foretold a vixenish temper when thwarted, or if the world went wrong with her, these were bad points still in embryo, little likely to deter so matter of fact a wooer as Diggle from prosecuting his suit.

Not that he precipitated matters. He could see, with half an eye, that Miss Farrington accepted his attentions cheerfully enough ; but he was very doubtful whether her parents would look upon him with equal favour. Indeed, Sir Rupert had more than once spoken in a way to damp Diggle's hopes. The baronet held his head high. He evidently knew what was due to himself. Having passed his early years as a

struggling solicitor, barely able to keep the wolf from his door, he was now very eloquent about *mésalliances*, and the proper maintenance of distinctions of class. The major's heart misgave him, for reasons best known to himself, when he heard Sir Rupert inveighing against the annoyance of upstart tradesmen, who, on the strength of fortunes amassed by not too reputable business (so he said), aped the manners of their betters, and tried to push themselves forward into the front rank of society. This very visit to Farrington Hall, a crusty old county magnate to whom Diggle had been formally introduced, had remarked rather pointedly upon the major's name.

‘Diggle, Diggle, I know the name. To be sure. Get my tea from Diggle's. Devilish good tea too—no connection, major, eh?’

At which Major Cavendish-Diggle inwardly shuddered, although he replied promptly enough.

‘Come and taste our champagne at Triggertown, Mr. Burkinshaw; it’s far better than the best tea in the world.’ Whereby the inconvenient question was for the moment satisfactorily shelved.

Diggle knew, therefore, that much circumspection would be necessary if he aspired to Letitia’s hand. All he could hope to gain was the girl’s good-will and co-operation, and this, by his assiduous, although diplomatically veiled attentions, he secured in due course.

Meanwhile he sought and entirely succeeded in making himself agreeable to all in the house. He talked ‘central fire’ with Sir Rupert, parochial business and district visiting with Lady Farrington, who pre-

tended to play the Dorcas in the parish; he discussed turnips and quarter sessions with the squires and local magnates, who thought that such matters comprised the whole duty of man; last of all, he played duets and danced with Miss Farrington after dinner, in a way she called, and really felt to be divine.

‘It does not bore you to dance?’ she asked him one evening.

‘And with *you*? No, indeed, and really I am passionately devoted to it.’

‘Some men now-a-days are so fine. They stand about the doors at a dance like farm servants at a fair waiting to be hired.’

‘That’s not the way with the Duke’s Own,’ said Diggle, laughing. ‘No idlers are allowed when we give a ball. You should see our youngsters dance; and we have a string band on purpose for dance music.’

‘Delightful! Do give us a ball, Major Diggle.’

‘With all my heart; when you like. You shall fix the day, and it shall be the finest Triggertown has ever seen.’

The subject was re-opened another day, when Diggle was not by.

‘Does it rest with him?’ incredulous Sir Rupert asked of Ernest. ‘What does your colonel say?’

‘Oh, Colonel Prioleau’s “not in it” compared to Major Cavendish. We always call him Major Cavendish, he likes it better. The Major’s the leading man in the regiment. He does just as he pleases. There’s nobody like him.’

And Ernest went off into pæans of praise, expatiating upon Diggle’s innumerable good qualities with all the eloquence (it was not much) he could command.

But he did not exaggerate the Major's influence in the regiment. The ball, which came off a month or so later, was on a scale of unprecedented splendour, mainly because Diggle had resolved that it should be so. He had taken the affair altogether into his own hands. It was he who insisted that the ices should come straight from Gunter's, that there should be *foie gras*, plovers' eggs, and fresh truffles at supper; it was he who had conceived the brilliant idea of placing silver-hooped barrels in the tea rooms, full of champagne constantly on tap. He had commissioned the best decorators in London to do up the ball rooms; one built, contiguous to the mess-house, a boudoir, intended for the sole use of ladies, which was furnished with ivory toilet appliances, and lined with amber satin throughout; another designed an artificial grotto filled with

blocks of real ice, which, as they melted, fed a number of fountains, whose waters fell in showers of sweet-scented spray; a third, entrusted with the floral decorations, grouped great masses of tropical plants, a wealth of rich variegated colours in the corridors, before the fireplaces, and in all the best points of view. There were two rooms for dancing; in one the inimitable string band of the Duke's Own performed, in the other a detachment of Coote and Tinney's was specially engaged.

‘Ith moth wontherful, thertainly,’ said Lady Farrington, in raptures, as Diggle received her; and having presented her to quiet Mrs. Prioleau, who was in duty bound to do the honours, but who was utterly bored and worn out after the first five minutes, led her to a seat of state on a sort of dais at the top of the room.

‘Oh, Major Cavendish-Diggle!’ cried Letitia, ‘you have indeed achieved a most triumphant success. It’s like a scene in fairy-land. The flowers, and the innumerable lights, the falling waters. Exquisite, enchanting;’ and she half closed her eyes, as in an ecstasy of bliss.

‘I wonder what it will all cost?’ growled Sir Rupert, *sotto voce*. ‘A pretty penny. I shall have Ernest overdrawing again.’

The fact being that, although Ernest received a handsome allowance, his account was perpetually overdrawn. Constant association with Diggle did not tend to economical ways. What with grouse for breakfast, and hot-house fruits for lunch; what with great guest nights, and expensive wines flowing freely, his mess bills were enormous. Then there were his horses, his dog-cart to take him to the station, his

chambers in the neighbourhood of St. James's, his boot varnish, and his new hats once a fortnight, and his fresh 'button-holes' every two or three hours. Sir Rupert hardly knew how the money went, but he knew that the six hundred a year he allowed his son, which was more than he had enjoyed for years until he came into the title, did not go half as far as it should, and he grumbled at the extravagance and ostentation of this great ball.

The baronet was not in the best of humours, therefore, as he stood upon one of the two raised platforms which had been erected on each side of the regimental colours, for the accommodation of the most distinguished guests. The colours were uncased, and drooped gracefully over a trophy of swords and bayonets, the whole being under the protection of two stalwart

sentries in full uniform, who stood erect and impassive, like stone statues, perfectly unmoved by the revels in progress around. It was a signal honour to be permitted to mount guard in the ball-room, and only the finest-looking and the steadiest men were selected for the duty. But the duty was fatiguing, and the sentries were relieved every hour, the relief being carried out quietly, but strictly in accordance with the regulations, by non-commissioned officers carefully selected, like the sentries, on account of their smartness and gallant bearing.

While Sir Rupert was standing scowling at the entertainment, for which, without sharing in the honour and glory, he would probably have to pay, the relief marched in. He looked on at the ceremony without interest, heard with indifferent ears the

trite words of command, 'Port arms, take post, shoulder, order,' and the rest, when something in the aspect of the corporal in command attracted his attention, and he found himself looking curiously at the soldier's face.

Surely he knew it? Where had he seen it before?

Then with a sudden start he remembered. The man was the living image of cracked Lady Farrington's *protégé*—of that lad whom he, Sir Rupert, had inveigled down into Devonshire, and left there to starve. Could it possibly be the same man? Did the fellow know him? Apparently not.

He was still debating the point as the relief marched away, when all doubts were set at rest by hearing a very young lady, a child, in fact (it was Edith Prioleau), say

laughingly, and with the accents of Stratford-le-Bow, as she touched the corporal on the arm with her fan,

‘*En bien, Caporal Larkins, comment vous portez-vous?*’

To which the corporal replied, with a smile,

‘*Très bien, mademoiselle. Et vous?*’

There could be no mistake. Look, name, voice, all were the same. What a curious fatality! In the same regiment as his son—the true heir and the false serving side by side. Should he tell Ernest? Then Sir Rupert, pondering much, came to the conclusion that it would be best to keep his own counsel, but resolved to put, if possible, a watch upon the young man.

CHAPTER X.

MUTINY IN THE RANKS.

THERE was great grief in the Duke's Own. Colonel Prioleau was about to leave the regiment. He had commanded it for a number of years, and would have liked to have gone on commanding it to the end of the chapter, but promotion to the rank of general was fast approaching him, and he felt that he must 'realise' at least a part of his cash. Colonels of regiments in old days served for about tenpence a-day. The rest of their pay barely represented the interest upon the capital sum they had sunk in purchasing their rank. By exchanging to half-pay before promotion, a regimental lieutenant-colonel was able to pull a few

thousands out of the fire; and this Colonel Prioleau did.

There was great grief in the regiment at his approaching retirement. It was not so much on account of his personal qualities, although these—more particularly his easy going *laissez aller* system—had long gained him great popularity, but because the command was to pass into the hands of one who was not, as the saying is, a ‘Duke’s Own man.’ Major Byfield had exchanged into the corps some few years previously, very much against the will of the regiment. Not that there was anything against him. Appearances were indeed in his favour. He was a quiet gentlemanly little person, with that slightly apologetic manner, and hesitating air, which often earn a man appreciation from his fellows, because they indicate a tacit acknowledgment of his in-

feriority. Major Byfield showed himself still more nervous and undecided on joining the Duke's Own. Although as a field officer his position was assured, and entitled him to considerable deference from all, he seldom claimed it or asserted himself more than he could help. His brother officers tolerated him, and were civil to him when they saw him, which was not often; but they yielded him no respect, and suffered him to interfere very little in the discipline and management of the corps. What could he know about the Duke's Own, or its regimental 'system?' He had come from the 130th which, it was well known, had a very different 'system,' although both were, in fact, ruled by the Queen's Regulations, and should have been governed on precisely the same lines. There is a good deal of mystery made and much stress laid upon the 'sys-

tem' in force in a regiment. No doubt in many minor details there is a marked difference, but the broad outlines are, or ought to be, the same. But it is a favourite dogma, especially with officers in whom *esprit de corps* is strong, that no one can understand this system unless he has been trained in a regiment and assimilated it with his earliest ideas. So when the major spoke even in a whisper, or made the faintest hint of a suggestion, he was pooh-poohed and put down. Diggle, his fellow, although junior field officer, quietly said that it was all nonsense, that Byfield misunderstood the situation, that he had better wait till he had longer experience in the regiment before he presumed to put forward his views.

Major Byfield was thus satisfactorily repressed—but only for the time. He had

views and opinions of his own upon soldiering, and he was determined when opportunity came to give them full play. They had long persistently preached up and paraded before him the system in force in the Duke's Own, but he had for as long come to the conclusion that the system was a bad one, and was resolved to reform it should he ever come into power. His character was a strange medley of opposite qualities. Behind the nervous diffidence, which being upon the surface seemed his most prominent trait, was an amount of quiet self-opinionated obstinacy which boded ill for those under his orders should he ever have much authority in his hands. Mrs. Byfield could have opened people's eyes had she been permitted to disclose the secrets of the Byfield *ménage*. The major was as narrow-minded as a woman, and as

prone to mistake the relative proportion of things, to entirely ignore the main issues, to neglect or overlook broad questions, and concentrate himself with much tenacity upon comparatively unimportant details.

These peculiarities began to develop themselves very soon after he obtained the command. It became evident that the new colonel was a different man from what was supposed. He had been deemed a cipher—one who could hardly call his soul his own; but he proved a fussy, fidgetty, anxious creature, who from nervous apprehension, backed up by no small amount of self-conceit, promised to make everybody's life a burden to him. The officers as a body began to fear that the good old times were on the wane. The decadence of the Duke's Own must have fairly commenced when leave for hunting was refused and

there were two commanding officers' parades on the same day. The fact was, the Colonel had resolved to reform the regiment according to his own ideas, and had already set to work with a will. The points on which it fell short of perfection were very clear to his own mind—a weak, but extremely active mind. He thought the officers neglected their business and knew too little of it—facts incontrovertible no doubt, although the remedy was not easy to discover, and needed stronger treatment than Colonel Byfield was in a position to apply. He felt dissatisfied, too, with the demeanour of the men in quarters and on parade, and if it was more within his compass to bring about improvement in these respects, his task was likely to be surrounded with the greater difficulty if his officers were discontented and soured. But the Colonel could

not see much beyond the end of his nose, and rushed forward blindly to his fate.

To come in for a large share of criticism, not to say abuse, from those under his orders, is too commonly the lot of the regimental lieutenant-colonel. Colonel Byfield was no exception to the general rule. Before he had been in command a month, his officers generally began to disapprove of his proceedings; after three, they disliked him cordially; and this grew into positive hatred at the end of six. Of course they kept their opinions very much to themselves. English officers, however grievous their wrongs, whether real or fancied, never overstep the bounds of due subordination; and however much those of the Duke's Own may have chafed at their commanding officer's trying ways and irksome rule, they did no more than call him a 'beast' to one

another, and utter frequent and fervid, but private prayers for his translation to some other sphere in this world or the next. They bore their burden bravely enough, silently too and without protest, except when some graceless subaltern or more artful captain wilfully exhibited an utter ignorance of the very rudiments of drill by clubbing his company upon parade, or comported himself disgracefully at the weekly examinations—offences especially heinous in the eyes of a Colonel whose greatest ‘fad’ was to make his officers walking *vade mecums* or living encyclopædias of military knowledge. The schoolmaster was abroad in the Duke’s Own, very much to everyone’s discomfort and dissatisfaction.

Excessive timidity, an exaggerated fear of constituted authority, were the secrets of Colonel Byfield’s irritating line of conduct.

He was for ever invoking the distant deities of the Horse Guards, and deprecating their wrath. As for their local chief priest, the general officer commanding the Triggertown district, whose authority was much more tangible and near at hand, Colonel Byfield had for him the most wholesome and abject apprehension. It was to appease the possible fury of this awful functionary that he worried and harassed the regiment from morning till night.

‘What will the general say?’ or ‘What will the general do?’ were phrases continually on his lips. He forgot that, as a matter of fact, the general, who was an ordinary general, would probably say or do nothing at all. But this professional ‘Jorkins’ was quoted on every occasion.

‘I cannot overlook your misconduct,’ he would say to Joe Hanlon, when brought up

for the thousandth time for being drunk.

‘The general won’t let me.’

‘As if the general cared,’ muttered ‘the Boy’ to himself.

‘I must punish you; I must, indeed.’

‘Colonel Prioleau never did, sir; and I hope, sir—’

‘Colonel Prioleau is not here now, and I don’t choose to be spoken to in that way. Fourteen days’ marching order drill; and if you come here again, I’ll try you for “Habitual”—I will, mark my words.’

‘What’s the good of serving on in the old corps now?’ said Hanlon, very wroth, after he had done his defaulter’s drill. ‘It’s not what it used to be. I’ll put in for my discharge.’

He was fully entitled to it. Twenty-one years’ service, all told. Five good-conduct badges, less one, which his recent miscon-

duct had robbed him of; for with old soldiers it is strength of head, or immunity from punishment that brings reputation; and Hanlon, thanks to Colonel Prioleau's good nature, had the credit of being one of the best behaved men in the regiment.

'I won't stay to be humbugged about,' he said, indignantly, to his comrade Herbert. 'I'll take my pension and look out for a billet in civil life.'

'What can you get to do?'

'Lots of things. Commissionaire, prison warder, attendant in a lunatic 'sylum.'

Herbert pricked up his ears.

'Do you think you could get the last? I wish you would, and I'll tell you why. You've never heard my story?'

Whereupon Herbert told it all.

'I knew you was a nob from the first. I saw it in your talk and in the cut of your

jib. Dr. Plum's of Greystone, you say. Right you are. That's where I'll go. Tomorrow, if not sooner, and I'll give you the office—double quick. Hold on a bit, that's all you've got to do; hold on, and do your duty, and it'll all come right in the end. And see here—'

Hanlon looked about him, as if afraid of listeners.

'Things ain't comfortable in the old corps, not just now; and there's going to be a row. They won't let on to you, 'cos you're a non-com, and what's more, only a recruit. There's men in the regiment mean mischief, if they only get the chance; and if they don't, they'll make it, sure as my name's Joe.'

'What can they do?'

'They don't think or care. All they want is a rumpus, so as to get old Byfield

in trouble and make him leave, and that they'll be able to do. Don't join them, not whatever they say. Keep your ears cocked, and nip in—only on the right side.'

Hanlon had taken his discharge and got the promise of a billet at Dr. Plum's, when the storm actually broke in the Duke's Own.

Colonel Byfield had been agitated beyond measure at the news of the approaching move of his regiment to one of the large camps, and in view of the scrutiny which there awaited him his petty tyranny had passed all bounds. He had parades morning, noon, and night. He exercised the men *ad nauseam* at squad drill, goose step, and the manual and platoon. He marched them perpetually in battalion up and down the barrack yard, and he took them out day after day upon Triggertown

Common for light infantry drill. All this, albeit torture of the most painful description, they could have tolerated probably without a murmur had not the Colonel, dissatisfied with the progress made, sentenced the regiment to be deprived of all leave in all ranks.

This was the point at which the worm turned. One fine morning, long after the 'dressing' bugle had sounded, followed by the 'non-commissioned officers call' and the 'fall-in,' not a man made his appearance upon parade. Colonel Byfield and the officers had the whole square to themselves. The rest of the regiment with the exception of a number of men belonging to one company, F, formed up in the ditch, and while the commanding officer was whistling at vacancy, marched off in excellent order to a distant part of the glacis,

where they piled arms and refused to return.

It would be tedious, and it indeed forms no part of this history to narrate, except in the briefest terms, the progress of this very serious military *lâche*. The men, as is usual in such cases, went to the wall. The ringleaders were hunted out, tried and severely punished, and the whole regiment was ordered to proceed on foreign service forthwith. The causes which had led to the disturbance were closely investigated, and as a natural consequence Colonel Byfield was placed upon half-pay.

It was for a long time doubtful whether Diggle, who was the next senior, should be allowed to succeed to the command; but he brought all the interest he could to bear, and he eventually won the day.

As Colonel Diggle, commanding a corps

really distinguished, although temporarily under a cloud, he found Sir Rupert Farrington not indisposed to accept his proposals for Letitia; and the marriage came off just before the regiment embarked for Gibraltar.

It was at Farrington Hall that the conversation turning, as it had done more than once before, upon the recent mutiny, brought our hero, Herbert Larkins, prominently to the front.

‘The movement was not general, certainly not,’ Diggle had said. ‘One of the companies, F, Ernest’s in fact, did not take any share in it.’

‘Does Ernest deserve the credit of that?’

‘Not exactly. It was due rather to an astute young corporal, who quietly locked the doors of the men’s rooms. They couldn’t get out to join.’

‘Really? He was promoted, of course?’

‘Yes; he is now a sergeant, and is sure to get on. Oh yes, young Larkins is sure to get on.’

‘It was young Larkins, was it?’

‘Do you know him?’

‘I think I do. I will tell you about it one of these days.’

Diggle, as one of the Farrington family, would soon have a right to know.

CHAPTER XI.

SOME OLD FRIENDS MEET.

FOR some time after their arrival on the Rock, the officers of the Duke's Own called it a detestable hole. They were sore at their expatriation and the manner of it; they regretted the joys they had left behind, and could see no good thing in the much vaunted station where they were now relegated for their sins. There was nothing to be done in the place; the climate was intolerable, and there was nothing to eat. They had arrived towards the end of the summer, and the season, never cool, had been unusually sultry. They came in too for the tail end of a long visitation of the 'Levanter,' the much dreaded east wind,

which caps the Rock with a perpetual cloud and makes life miserable to all; and the welcome change, when it came at length, was heralded by a tremendous thunderstorm and drenching rains. The Duke's Own were still under canvas at the North Front, waiting till the outgoing regiment vacated its quarters at Windmill Hill, and their encampment was nearly swept away by the storm. Officers lost baggage, the men their kits, and the whole regiment united in deep denunciations of the inhospitable Rock.

Nor did Gibraltar seem to improve upon a closer acquaintance. Its joys and amusements, what were they after London and the shires? Racing! the idea was too preposterous. Half-a-dozen tinpot nags without pace or breeding, cantering round a Graveyard and finishing in a trot. What

sort of sport was that to offer the Duke's Own, which had always had its own regimental drag to witness the great events at home, and which kept open house in its luncheon tent at Ascot and Goodwood and upon Epsom Downs? The hunting too! heaven save the mark! To talk of hunting with the sweepings of a few second-rate kennels, dignified with the name of a pack, when the huntsman was a local genius, and foxes were said to be so scarce or so little enterprising that it was often necessary to have recourse to a red herring! What was such hunting to men who had been constantly out (so they said) with the Heythorp, the Bramham Moor, the Pytchley and Quorn?

These were the earliest impressions of Gibraltar prevailing among the officers of the Duke's Own. But our friends eventually

changed their tone. By their first contemptuous abstention, they found, in the first place, that they lost all the fun that was going, and, next, that, although the sport was second-rate, they could not excel in it even when they tried. One or two of the Duke's Own, who were said to be in all the secrets of the Dawson and John Scott stables, went in for some of the plates and cups at the autumn meeting, and signally failed in everything. Later on, when the hunting season really began, and they turned out in a body in red coats and the most undeniable tops, to cut everybody down, they were chagrined to find that it was much more difficult to follow than they supposed. Red coats and mahogany tops were nowhere at the end of the first burst. One or two men were completely thrown out; a few tried the breakneck

country between 'the Rivers' only to crane at length and turn back from the precipices and steep inclines. After that first day the Duke's Own spoke more respectfully of the Calpe Hunt. By and bye they became less critical in other respects, and at length, when they had been some six months on the Rock, entered as fully into its amusements, and enjoyed them as thoroughly as the oldest stagers in the place.

There was one person, however, connected with the Duke's Own who highly appreciated Gibraltar from the first. Mrs. Cavendish-Diggle found the station extremely to her taste. A bride still in the hey-day of her married life, full of satisfaction at the importance of her position as the commanding officer's wife, with the attention she thereby received from all the Duke's Own, Letitia found soldiering, par-

ticularly at Gibraltar, everything that could be desired. But what she enjoyed most of all was the chance she now had of bullying the brother who hitherto had had it all his own way at home. Ernest might be the most worthy at Farrington Hall, but in the Duke's Own he was under Colonel Diggle's command, and Colonel Diggle was now unquestionably under that of his wife. How the exquisite and self-sufficient Diggle had succumbed was a mystery which will probably remain unexplained till the curtain lectures of the Diggle couple are given to the world. Then it will no doubt transpire that in the exercise of those inquisitorial functions which every wife naturally arrogates to herself, Letitia had come across certain damaging facts connected with the Colonel's antecedents which put him completely under his partner's thumb. That

Mrs. Diggle would come ere long to command the regiment was already plainly apparent to all, and the fact was not hailed with particular joy in the corps. Petticoat government in a regiment is not the most successful with, nor is it the most palatable to those most closely concerned. Letitia's temper was a little too imperious to be pleasant. She made nipping remarks, and snubbed and put people down in a way they hated but were powerless to resent. 'Oh! how can you say so, Major Greathed! You are wrong, *quite* wrong. She married Lord Chigford's second son. But then you can't be expected to know;' or 'It's not what I have been accustomed to, Mrs. Moxon. In my father's house the house-keeper looked to these things. But then of course you—' which might be taken to imply that Mrs. Moxon had been brought up

very differently, and could not be expected to know what was what. Or she lectured the youngsters when they came within her reach, which was only when they wanted leave, knowing that without her good word they could not expect an hour. 'I hear you are getting sadly in debt, Mr. Maulverer. I shall write to Sir George.' 'So you were not at church parade last Sunday, Mr. Smythe. The Colonel was quite cross.' 'Don't get entangled by any of these bright-eyed scorpions, Mr. Curzon. You see I know all about it. Carmen Molinaro would never do for you.' All of which irritated and exasperated the officers of the Duke's Own very considerably.

The man who most cordially hated her, however, was the adjutant, Mr. Wheeler. He was chafed perpetually by her interference. Nothing was sacred to her. She

rushed into professional matters with all the effrontery of the fool. So long as she contented herself with favouring her pets among the soldiers' wives Wheeler did not care. It was when she presumed to advise as to the orderly room work, the correspondence, promotions, and daily routine, that he not unnaturally turned rusty. Whether or not she read the colonel's letters he scarcely cared, but he did resent having to prepare important despatches from her notes, or send out letters which she had obviously drafted with her own hand. Nor could he, after so many years of nearly absolute authority, readily or cheerfully resign his power in the regiment. Hitherto advancement for the non-commissioned officers had depended mainly upon his good word. Now it was becoming evident that their promotion would

depend in future upon that of the colonel's wife. In one particular case which nearly affected a friend of ours they had fought a sharp battle; the adjutant was obstinate, but the lady was more so, and in the end the latter won the day. It was entirely through Letitia's good offices that Herbert Larkins became a colour-sergeant long before the ordinary time. She had taken a fancy to the young man—not, you may be sure, because of his presumed connection with the family, for of that she had not the slightest inkling—but because it had lain within his power to do her important service, and because he was a smart, well-grown fellow to boot. Letitia, like many other ill-favoured women, had a keen eye for manly beauty.

But she had really reason to be grateful to Herbert. One day, when he was on

guard upon the Upper Road, Mrs. Cavenish-Diggle, followed by her groom, passed on their way towards the town. Something startled Letitia's horse, and, although an excellent rider, she found he was more than she could manage. After passaging like a crab along the road for some hundred yards, he took to plunging and rearing in a way to dislodge the most accomplished horse-woman from her seat. The groom had ridden up alongside, but he was able to render little assistance, and his best efforts only made Letitia's horse worse. Had not Herbert promptly supervened, Mrs. Diggle would undoubtedly have been thrown, and probably badly hurt. But with firm hand on the rein he soon mastered the horse, then gradually pacified him.

‘I'm sure, sergeant, I'm extremely

obliged to you,' said Mrs. Cavendish, directly she recovered her breath. 'What is your name? I must speak of you specially to the Colonel—Colonel Diggle—you know me, I presume? and I see you belong to "us."'

'Herbert Larkins, Madam, F company,' said our hero briefly, as he saluted.

'Thank you again, so much.' And with that the Colonel's wife rode off.

She did speak of him and his conduct in the most glowing terms.

'You must do something for him, Conrad.'

'Certainly, I'll make him a present; or, better still, you shall—a watch, or a pencil-case, or something.'

'No, no; something in the regiment, I mean. Promote him.'

'He's very young. Barely a year a

sergeant. I don't see my way, I don't indeed.'

'There are those vacant colours in G company,' she said, displaying a curiously intimate acquaintance with regimental news.

'Colour-sergeant! Impossible!'

'Surely not, when I ask it.'

'It would be grossly unfair. Promotions must not go by favour.'

'Kissing does,' she replied, as though he might expect no such reward unless he were more obliging. It was just possible that by this time Diggle could have deprived himself of the pleasure without any acute pang.

'What would Mr. Wheeler say?'

'That's where it is. You think far more of displeasing Mr. Wheeler than of pleasing me. I feel hurt, Conrad; it's not

what I have a right to expect, considering—'

When she got on this tack the Colonel threw up the sponge. He gave in about the promotion, although the adjutant, thereby making Letitia his enemy for life, tried hard to keep him up to the mark.

The whole thing would have been a job of the worst kind had Herbert been less worthy. But he had really developed into an excellent soldier, smart, personable, and thoroughly well up in his work. He had his drill-book at his fingers' ends, and could handle a squad as well as any man in the corps. He had learnt by heart all the details of interior economy, and was fully competent to take the charge and payment of a company, or to do credit to his regiment in any position in which he might be

placed. All this Mr. Wheeler was forced to admit; and although he cherished a grudge against Herbert on account of what had passed, he so loved a good soldier that he could not bear malice long.

Colour-Sergeant Larkins was indeed fast becoming a very prominent person in the corps. Some backbiting and no little jealousy existed, no doubt, but he was the sort of man to soon outgrow and outlive such feelings. There was much in his manner and address to make him generally popular. His bright face, his cheerful voice, his manly straightforward ways, commended him of themselves. But he had other claims to the suffrages of his fellows. His old skill in games had not deserted him, and soldiers are very like schoolboys in their admiration and respect for personal prowess. The Duke's Own eleven, thanks

to Herbert's batting and bowling, won every match always at the North Front. His brother sergeants felt lucky if they could secure him for a hand of fives. In all other gymnastic exercises he came equally well to the front. At the garrison athletic sports, which presently came off, as they always do, upon the racecourse at the North Front, he carried everything before him, to the intense gratification of his comrades in the corps.

The name of Sergeant Larkins was indeed on every lip that day. All the world of Gibraltar was present. His Excellency the Governor came in state, so did the general, second in command, and officers of all grades with their wives; crowds of soldiers of all the regiments in garrison were there, and all cheered Herbert to the echo as he carried off the hurdle-race in magnificent

style. As for the Duke's Own, a lot of them, frantic with delight, got him on their shoulders, and were carrying him about in triumph, when some one came up, and with a hurried nervous manner, said,

‘Sergeant Larkins ; where’s Sergeant Larkins ?’

‘Who wants him ?’ said a dozen voices, thinking perhaps the governor had asked him to dinner, or the Queen had sent to make him a general on the spot.

‘An old friend. The oldest he’s got, I think he’ll say, when he sees me and hears my name.’

His enthusiastic supporters dropped Herbert, who came forward to speak to the inquirer.

‘It’s himself, himself, by all that’s holy ! Hercules Albert, don’t you remember me ?’ cried the man, as he seized both Herbert’s

hands, shaking them furiously, and seeming to wish to hug him in his arms.

It was the old Sergeant Larkins, his stepfather, for whom he had so long searched in vain.

‘I heard them calling out the name, and it sounded so queer that I thought I’d have a look at you. How you’ve grown! But tell me all about yourself. Quick, lad. I want to hear, and the mother she—’

‘She’s all right and well, I hope,’ Herbert asked, as soon as he could put in a word. ‘Let’s go to her at once. How comes it I’ve never seen you before?’

‘Only landed from Malta on transfer last week, myself, the missus, and three of the bairns, that’s how it was. But come along, come to the mother at once; she’ll be crazy with delight when she sees you, and so will all the rest.’

CHAPTER XII.

REVELATIONS.

THE Larkins family had taken up their residence in a small cottage on the road to the Moorish Castle. Larkins *père* was now principal barrack-sergeant, and as such was entitled to fairly good quarters. He had aged considerably since our first acquaintance with him. His hair was grizzled, his gait was stiff as though his ankle-joints were affected by innumerable barrack inspections, and his eyes were weak from constant search for nail-holes or other barrack damages, or the continuous appraisement of fair wear and tear. Mrs. Larkins had also changed appreciably. She was still buxom, however, and her voice had

lost none of its shrill power when she was aroused. This was more seldom than of yore. Her children were no longer the trial they had once been. The two eldest boys were out in the world ; Sennacherib was in the band of a regiment at Malta, and Rechab was at the same place on board a man-of-war. Two younger ones, Ascanius and Leonora, were still at home, and so was Jemima Ann, familiarly called Mimie, now a blooming maiden of nineteen, with a soft voice, a sweet face, and eyes bright enough to give the heart-ache to half the young fellows of the place.

The old sergeant preceded Herbert into the cottage, to prepare his wife for a surprise.

‘Some one I know, Jonadab? Some one I’ve not seen these years? A colour-sergeant in the Duke’s Own? What are

you driving at? I know no colour-sergeants; for the matter of that none of the Duke's Own,' Herbert heard her say as she came to the door.

The moment she set eyes upon her visitor she started and shook all over. She seemed dazed, and could frame no word of speech. Then all at once she gave way, and taking Herbert's hands in hers, drew him towards her, kissing him again and again, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks.

'What, Hercules, boy! My boy, my own sweet boy! This is a sight for sore eyes. Where have you dropped from, and in this dress? Come in, boy, come in and tell us all your news.'

And Herbert was led into the house.

Mimie came shyly forward when she was called to add her welcome to the brother she had almost forgotten. But she

offered him her cheek quite naturally, and received a sister's salute, which, nevertheless, sent the warm blood tingling through her veins.

‘You are a sister to be proud of,’ said Herbert. ‘What a beauty you have grown!’

‘Grown!’ interrupted Mrs. Larkins. ‘It’s you who’ve grown out of all memory almost, except to those who love you. But now sit down and let’s know all about it. What brought *you* to take the shilling? and you never let on, not one word. You might have written to us, Hercules. We, Jonadab and me, have had you always in our thoughts, thinking you were getting to be a fine gentleman who’d have nothing to do with the likes of us.’

‘As if I could ever forget my mother.’

Mrs. Larkins made a gesture which

might have meant a strong negative to the expression.

‘When did you leave school? Why did you enlist! You never wrote to us.’

‘Four years ago. I was turned adrift in the world, that was why. I wrote over and over again to the Horse Guards, but could not hear where you were.’

‘And Lady Farrington, did she change her mind, or what?’

‘She went mad, so they said, and they locked her up in an asylum.’

‘Mad!’ shouted the sergeant. ‘Didn’t I always tell you so? mad? She were madder than Mike Horniblow who shot the Maltee, and as mad as our old colonel on an inspection parade.’

‘How was she locked up? who did it? Let’s know all that,’ said Mrs. Larkins.

Herbert recounted fully all that had

occurred. His leaving Deadham School, the visit to the west country, Sir Rupert Farrington's ill-treatment.

‘So that’s what the poor soul was after! Searching for a grandson to succeed to the title and estates,’ cried the sergeant. ‘And you were the last that she found. Well: it’s an ill wind, you know; leastways you got the schooling, even if you are none of her kith or kin.’

‘I suppose I am not, really?’ Herbert asked, looking very hard at Mrs. Larkins, who met the glance without lowering her eyes. There was something in her expression which Herbert immediately understood. There must be an explanation between them, but it could not take place then and there.

‘How should you be?’ asked the sergeant. ‘Didn’t I take you over with the

mother when I married her at York? The widow Conlan, she was then, and you her only child.'

'Conlan is my name then?'

'By rights, yes; but you've took that of Larkins now, and you are a credit to it; so you may take it for what it's worth, and keep it till you can find a better.'

Was there ever a chance of that? Was he really a Farrington after all, and might he yet prove his claims? Of this no one could give him a clue but Mrs. Larkins, and he gathered from her manner that the subject was one which she would only discuss when they were alone. He had no chance that time of speaking to her on this the subject nearest his heart. The rest of the evening was spent in the interchange of personal news, as is the case when friends and relatives meet after a long se-

paration, and there is so much on both sides to tell and hear.

But Herbert went to the cottage next day. The sergeant, fortunately, was at the barrack-office; Mimie was out of the way, and Mrs. Larkins had the house all to herself.

‘I want to know all you can tell me, mother. Is it not natural? To whom else should I come? For you *are* my mother, are you not?’

‘No mother could feel more warmly for her child than I do for you, Hercules.’

‘Do but tell me, plainly—I am really your son?’

Mrs. Larkins was silent.

‘It is cruel to keep me in this suspense, mother,—for you have been one to me always. I implore you to tell me the whole truth.’

‘I will, Hercules, or Herbert as you ought by rights to be called. It is a hard matter to tell you all the tale, for there is shame and sorrow in it enough, and that for both you and me.

‘I must begin at the beginning. Years, years ago when I was a bit of a girl in my father’s house, I and my twin sister Annie—whom I loved dearly, as the apple of my eye—father lived at Newark-on-Trent; he was a small tradesman, but well enough to do. Mother died when we were quite chicks, and we grew up to have things much our own way. Annie was a real beauty, and had dozens of lads after her always, but she never fancied none of them. At last luck sent a recruiting party of the 12th Lancers to Newark. One of them was a young corporal, as proper a chap as ever took the shilling, fair spoken, well

educated, and superior to the common run. He soon got courting our Annie, and he was the first she favoured. Father did not like it—not a bit. He hated soldiers, and was very rough about Corporal Smith. Annie and he had high words over it, and one day she was not to be found.

‘The recruiters had left the town too.

‘I won’t tell you what grief there was at home. Father was like a madman, and I was little better. He tried hard to get her back. He went miles—to the other end of England—after the regiment, but he never caught them up. He was too late. The regiment had been ordered off to the Cape of Good Hope. Through the rector, father wrote to the War Office, inquiring after Corporal Smith and his wife. The answer came months later, to say that the corporal was alive and well, but that

he had no wife—at least no one according to the regimental books.

‘Father never held up his head after that, and within the year he died. I was nearly heart-broken too; but I was young, and I bore up better. As I was all alone in the world, and had the shop on my hands, I took a husband, who offered just then—Michael Conlan, a clerk in a maltster’s at Newark. He was a kindly soul, not over strong, but he helped me in the business, and we managed to get along.

‘One night Annie returned—not alone—she had a child with her, her own, a few months old only, and the two came, seeking shelter and rest. It was as I thought at first—the old story—betrayed, neglected, left.’

‘But you took her in?’ Herbert asked, eagerly.

‘Of course. Neither Michael nor myself asked any questions; our duty was plain, and it was one of love besides for me. All I know is what Annie herself told me, and that was not much. The corporal, it seems, belonged really to a higher station in life. He had quarrelled with his friends and left his home, and wanted never to see or hear of them again. But when Annie’s child was born—’

‘He had married her?’

‘Annie would not acknowledge it; although her silence told only against her own sweet name. She wore a ring, but so may any one; and as to all other proofs she obstinately refused to speak. I pointed out the hardship to her boy. She admitted that, but said she had promised and could not break her word. So I did not worry her, but left her to speak in her own good

time. That time never came. Before Annie had been back a week I saw she was not long for this world. She pined and pined. She looked eagerly for news from abroad, but none came from where she sought it, and the disappointment helped the disease in bringing on the end.

‘On her death-bed I swore to be a mother to her boy—’

‘To me?’ said Herbert, no longer in doubt; and as she nodded assent, he took her hard hand and kissed it again and again.

‘And nobly you have fulfilled your oath.’

‘I did my best, Herbert. But I have more to tell you. Your mother, just before she died, gave me a letter. It was from your father to his friends, and was only to be sent to them at Annie’s death, or if she

was in dire distress. The letter was addressed to Lady Farrington of Farrington Hall. It was not sealed, and I thought I might read what was inside. There were only a few words: "From Herbert to his mother—Be kinder to my boy." I added a few of your bright curls, Herbert, and sent the letter on at once. But I gave no clue as to where it had come from. I wanted no answer. I was resolved to take no help from any one in doing my duty by you. I hated the whole of the Farringtons. I so hated the name of Herbert even, that we called you Hercules Albert instead.

‘Later on I lost Michael, my first husband; and I could not bear to remain in Newark alone. I sold up the shop and my belongings, and moved to York. It was there, as Mrs. Conlan, a widow, with one boy—you, Herbert—I met the Sergeant.

Things were not prospering with me. I married him gladly, and he has been a thorough good man to me.'

Herbert's heart was too full for him to speak for some time. Anger, disappointment, anguish—all three feelings possessed him. He was angry with his father, sore at heart for his mother's sorrow, disappointed that there was no more to tell him.

'Do you think there was a marriage, mother?'

'I do. I always did.'

'It all turns upon that. I may have Farrington blood in me; but whether or no would matter little if I was not entitled to bear the name.'

'You must make up your mind to your disappointment, Herbert. What clue can we get to the marriage after all these years?'

Everybody who could speak to it is probably dead.'

'My father—perhaps he is still alive.'

'Would he not have sought us out before this if he had been? But he has never made a sign. Nothing but a miracle could do you any good, my boy. Better be contented as you are. And why should you be cast down? You are young and strong. You have been educated like a gentleman; have made a first-rate start, and have everything before you. Make a name for yourself in the world if you can, and don't pine after what others might have given you.'

'How is a mere sergeant to make himself a name?'

'By sticking to his colours and doing his duty like a man. Non-commissioned

officers have got to the top of the tree before now. Why should not you?’

‘If we could only have a chance of service—there’s no other hope for a soldier. But we never have any fighting in these days.’

‘How do you know? You be ready for the chance when it offers, that’s all you’ve got to do. Get a commission, and you’ll hold yourself as high as Sir Rupert then, and meet him on equal terms.’

CHAPTER XIII.

FARRINGTON S'AMUSE.

IT seemed as if fate had resolved to make Gibraltar the gathering-place of those with whom Herbert Larkins was destined to be most closely concerned. Not long after the rencontre with his best friends, the Larkins', the news came that General Prioleau had been appointed to the command of the Infantry Brigade upon the Rock. Before the year was out, the former colonel of the Duke's Own arrived with his wife and little Edith, now fast growing into a beautiful and attractive girl.

It was not long before Herbert saw her, and had an opportunity of noticing the change.

General Prioleau, like many others of his rank, had a strong affection for his old corps, a sort of sneaking regard which, although it did him all honour, led him to wish that he still commanded it, and to act very much as if he did. He was not the first general officer who, entrusted with the charge of several battalions, narrowed his interest to the one in which he had himself served. To dry-nurse the Duke's Own on field days, to take an active share in its interior economy, to watch over its mess and all that appertained to the credit of the regiment, and generally to be as intimately associated with it as though he were still its colonel, were delights he could not forego. He was continually sending for Colonel Diggle to talk matters over, an interference which the great Cavendish resented, but was prohibited from protesting

against, by the rules of the service. Mrs. Diggle was not, and took full advantage of her exemption from the restrictions of military etiquette, to the extent of soundly abusing the general upon every occasion. Not that General Prioleau much cared. He did not command Mrs. Cavendish-Diggle, and directly he had made her acquaintance in her new character, he was heartily glad that he did not.

The general also visited the barracks of his old regiment repeatedly, on one excuse or another, but always with the avowed and really sincere intention of doing it a good turn. Now it was the reappropriation of quarters. Now the examination of drainage. Now the inspection of the married quarters or the canteen. Edith almost invariably accompanied him. She was in her element out here upon the Rock. The

rôle she now played was even more delightful than that of daughter of the regiment. There was much more importance and more movement in it. More variety too, and more power. Instead of knowing one regiment only, she now knew half a dozen. The circle of her acquaintance widened, and her military knowledge, such as it was. But her heart was with her first love always—the Duke's Own. When the general inspected the old regiment, she stayed by his side through it all. They made her go in to lunch, much to quiet Mrs. Prioleau's indignation when she heard of it; she sat on her pony close by the general, and, to judge by her remarks, seemed to take an active part in the whole proceedings. She kept up a running fire of comments.

‘There's Mr. Wheeler; why, he's getting quite old. And the sergeant-major,

he's gray; why do they keep him so long, father? He must be past his work before this. And Colonel Diggle—is he a *good* colonel, father? *I* don't think so. Well, as you say, perhaps I'm not a judge of colonels, but I am of gentlemen, and I don't call him a gentleman—not a real gentleman—do you?

‘My dear,’ the general said reprovingly, ‘you are a little too fast. Please remember—’

‘He's not a gentleman according to my ideas. There are lots of better gentlemen in the ranks—why,’ almost with a shriek, ‘there's my friend the learned pig—I mean the learned orderly. And, father, look! do look! They've made him a colour-sergeant—already!’

But her father was not attending.

‘Be good enough to form open column,

pile arms, and lay out kits,' he was saying to Colonel Diggle, which manœuvre satisfactorily carried out, the general continued his inspection on foot, accompanied by his daughter, who tripped along, holding up her habit, nodding to old friends as she went along, and so deeply interested in holdalls, tins of blacking, and pairs of socks, that you might have thought kit inspection was the one joy of her life.

'I am very glad to see you've got on so quickly,' she said gravely to young Colour-Sergeant Larkins, as she touched him on the arm with her whip by way of emphasis. 'You promised well, and I am pleased to think I was not disappointed,' went on the young personage, with the air of a queen-regnant reviewing her troops.

It was a gracious sight, and one no man—an impressionable young sergeant like

Larkins least of all—was likely to forget. The trim figure in its snow-white habit, the pretty bright face and its framework of light curls, surmounted with a coquettish little white hat; the air with which she pointed with her whip to his chevrons and the bright colours surmounting them, as she tripped daintily along. Never before or afterwards did Edith Prioleau seem more bewitching, and Herbert Larkins felt that he could lay down his life for her then and there.

Perhaps he talked a little more about her than he need have done when he next visited the cottage near the Moorish Castle. The Larkins' house had come to be quite his home, and he went there whenever he was off duty and could spare time. Life upon the Rock was a little monotonous for all below the rank of officer, and Herbert

was thankful that he had friends in the place. The narrow limits of the fortress, beyond which none but the commissioned may pass except on rare occasions, and then only by special permission, forbade any great variety of amusement or much change of scene. The rank and file rung the changes upon guard-house and drinking shop; when the first was done with for a time they identified themselves with the other. After twenty-four hours on Ragged Staff or New Mole, at Landport, Waterport, or the North Front, there was an especial sweetness for the soldier in 'black strap' or 'partridge eye'—variations of the local wine; while for the fireproof head which craved for the strongest stimulants, there was the *aguardiente*, or burning water, a title this engaging but curiously potent liquid richly deserved. For the sergeants,

in whom steadiness and sobriety were indispensable traits, these delights were forbidden, and they had but little relaxation after they had completed their day's routine, including the preparation of small returns, the responsibilities of minor commands, beyond a stroll upon the Alameda when the band played, or the perusal of the newspapers in the mess.

Herbert was more fortunate. Fond of books, Major Greathed supplied him with plenty, mainly of professional character, for although still in subordinate grades, soldiering was becoming more and more to our hero's taste, and he was eager to qualify for higher charges should it ever be his good fortune to rise. But it was greater pleasure to him still to talk at the cottage over what he had read; to pour forth to his mother, as he still called her, his am-

bitious yearnings, to express with increasing vehemence his vain regrets that he had not lived in another country and another age.

‘I wish I had been a Frenchman in the last century! No soldiers had such chances! One day a private, the next commanding a brigade. You’ll never see such things in our service.’

‘Don’t be cast down, Herbert,’ said warm-hearted sympathetic Mrs. Larkins. ‘Your chance will come if you’ll only wait.’

‘Yes, wait till I’m grey-haired. And when it comes what’ll it be? They may make me a quartermaster at fifty, or a second lieutenant at forty-five. I want my cake now, when it’s sweet and I am fit to enjoy it.’

‘And offer half to some one else? Is that what you’re dreaming about?’ asked Mrs. Larkins, with a sigh.

‘Psha! A general’s daughter, a mere child too! What absurdity to talk like that! No; I prefer to keep to my own station.’

Mrs. Larkins said nothing, but silence is sometimes more eloquent than words; and Mimie Larkins, who was present, looked up with a quick blush, which any man whose heart was touched would have interpreted his own way. The fiction of the relationship between these two had long since melted away. Good Mrs. Larkins, who had hated herself for keeping a secret from her husband, had told him the whole story very soon after Herbert had learnt the truth. Mimie, too, soon knew that the handsome sergeant who had kissed her and called her sister was really only a cousin, and as things went a very eligible *parti*.

Perhaps Mrs. Larkins, womanlike, was a matchmaker too. Why should she not encourage it? Herbert and her Mimie were cut out for each other; and if in the long run he should come into his own, why should not her daughter share his good fortune? Herbert was himself on the point of accepting the situation and succumbing to his fate. Mimie was attractive in no ordinary degree. She was a bright-eyed, sweet-voiced girl, with a gentle confiding manner, and very light-hearted ways. But then Herbert thought of his great aims, of the object of his life. To marry at all, at his age, would be to tie a millstone around his neck, a folly from which he would never recover.

When a man thinks thus, there is but little fear of his falling desperately in love. Then came the vision of the little lady, at

present so far above him in station, and he found himself drawing comparisons in which poor Mimie Larkins came off second-best.

For a time she resented it very bitterly. Mimie's was a simple impulsive nature; she was of a yielding malleable disposition, readily amenable to better influences, but she was also, like every daughter of Eve, fond of admiration and grieved when it was denied. Her heart was ready to go out to Herbert the moment she knew he was not her brother, and as time passed and he made no sign, she grew more and more discontented and cross. Now, his loud praises of this Miss Prioleau made her angrier than ever. Little minx, why did she come poaching upon other people's preserves? Oh, for a chance of showing Herbert that others were not so blind as he!

The chance came—all too soon. It was at a sergeants' ball that Ernest Farrington first crossed her path, and threw himself at once, metaphorically, at her feet. His attentions were perfectly respectful, but very marked, and Mimie was more than flattered by them. Here indeed was a chance of spiting Herbert! and she availed herself of it to the full, forgetting, in the pleasure it gave her, the terrible risk she ran. Her clandestine relations with young Farrington, who was not slow to follow up his advantage, had already become far too intimate to promise well for her peace of mind, when Herbert discovered all.

He taxed her with meeting Mr. Farrington alone upon the Alameda.

She tossed her head, first disdaining to reply, then saucily asking what business it was of his.

‘I shall tell your mother at once.’

‘Oh, don’t, don’t, please don’t do that! It would kill her if she knew. I’ll promise never to meet him again. Oh, Herbert, do not get me into such terrible trouble—you, of all people, to do it too! I didn’t think you could be so mean.’

Herbert was over-persuaded; at least, he was induced to spare Mrs. Larkins for the present and determined to try first an appeal to the other side.

He went to the colonel, Diggle, and told him all.

‘Really, my good fellow,’ said the colonel, ‘it’s no affair of mine. They don’t belong to the regiment, you see. I cannot interfere. I am not answerable for Mr. Farrington’s morals. I’m not indeed.’

Herbert was not to be done. He spoke

next to Ernest, the first time he got a chance.

‘Damn it, sir, what business is it of yours?’ asked the officer hotly.

‘It’s very much my business. She is my sister—at least we were brought up together as such,’ the sergeant no less hotly replied.

‘Then why don’t you speak to her instead of to me?’

‘Because I thought an appeal to you as a gentleman,’—there was a plain sneer in his intonation—‘which I fancied you were, would have the desired effect.’

‘Do you dare to say I am not a gentleman? By George, I’ll—’

‘I dare do more than that. Listen to me, Mr. Farrington; I swear you shall not do her harm. I’ll break every bone in your body.’

‘This is rank mutiny, by George. I’ve a good mind to put you in arrest. Do you dare to threaten your superior officer, sir?’ and Ernest walked off as the simplest way of ending the discussion.

Herbert had one other card to play. He wrote a full account of the whole affair to Sir Rupert Farrington, and signed his name.

Sir Rupert would probably have cared as little for Ernest’s proceedings, from the moral point of view, as did Diggle, but he had a not unnatural dread of entanglements, especially where so weak a person as his son was concerned. Moreover, although enraged against Larkins, and somewhat uneasy at the tone of the letter in which Herbert made pointed reference to his claims, and hinted mysteriously at certain close relations between the Larkins’ and

Farringtons, Sir Rupert felt it wisest not to enlighten Diggle further. He satisfied himself with writing at once to his son-in-law, begging him to let Ernest have leave and send him home. This Diggle did, without other reason than that Sir Rupert wished it, and Ernest, very obediently as it seemed, fell into the trap.

The young gentleman was, however, deeper than they gave him credit for being. He went home by the next mail, but Mimie Larkins followed him within a week, as soon as she could give her unhappy parents the slip; and thus, for the second time, Mrs. Larkins had reason to curse the Farrington name.

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